

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH:  
GLADIATORIAL GAMES, SACRIFICIAL RITUAL AND LITERARY ALLUSION

by  
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Title: A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH: GLADIATORIAL GAMES, SACRIFICIAL  
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Dr. Mary Jaeger

Roman gladiatorial games had significance far beyond that of mere spectacle and were more than savage and brutal entertainment for depraved emperors and bloodthirsty crowds. Classifying the games as a form of ritual, and by extension a means of communication, this study approaches Roman gladiatorial games as a type of text and employs literary theories regarding allusion to bring to light the more profound implications of the games. I focus on the ways in which gladiatorial games alluded to funerary and sacrificial ritual as well as to the idealized representations of masculine virtue in Roman literature and the native myths and legends that Romans used to define themselves. The gladiator was both the community's ideal agent and its sacrificial offering, and gladiatorial combat was the embodiment of Roman social values, religious practice, and national identity.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Few ancient institutions can captivate the imagination like the Roman games. Whether they are approached with a sense of morbid fascination or viewed with horror and disgust, it is difficult to ignore the long dried and vanished pools of bloody sand which now exist only in the mind's eye. The games have long been recognized as complex and multifaceted, as more than just spectacle for the sake of spectacle, and the desire to understand the full range of meaning behind them has persisted from antiquity until the present.

Early writers, historians, poets, orators and philosophers saw the games in various different ways: as a social or moral obligation; as a political tool; as a reflection of the authority and magnificence of imperial rule; as exempla of both good and bad behavior amongst the Roman people and their rulers—in short, the games were seen as having significance and implications beyond the confines of the arena.<sup>1</sup> Modern scholars have likewise sought to find the greater meaning of the games and to also find a way to

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero mentions the games in several of his works. In *In Verrem* (2.5.36) he expresses the magnitude and solemnity of the responsibility of the aedile-elect as the producer of annual *Ludi*. He also discusses the political and practical aspects of this responsibility in *Epistulae ad Familiares* (2.3, 7.1, 8.2, 8.9, et al.) and in the *De Officiis* (2.55-58). In the *Tusculanae Disputationes* (2.17.41) he uses the gladiator as an example of the way in which one must approach death. Seneca disapproves of certain types of spectacle in his *Epistles*, but also likens the wise man to a gladiator in his *De Tranquillitate Animi*. In Martial's *De Spectaculis Liber* the diversity of the crowd, events and animals described exemplify Rome's wide reaching influence and glorify the Flavian emperors. Tertullian, as a Christian writer, naturally has fewer positive things to say about the games in his *Apologia* and *De Spectaculis*.



reconcile Rome's reputation as a civilizing power with its taste for such a vicious form of entertainment.<sup>2</sup> Donald Kyle notes that, "models of the origins, nature, and function of the spectacles have ranged without consensus from pagan piety to human sacrifice and from sadism to imperial politics."<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, outside of the academic world there has been a tendency to oversimplify the games and classify them as merely the grotesque amusement of depraved rulers and bloodthirsty crowds, as an indication of the degeneracy of exotic and primitive people who were bound to fall. Amongst those who are more familiar with cinematic representations and Christian ideology than with historical and scholarly texts, the violence and brutality of the games seems so extreme and unfamiliar as to almost defy comprehension. As Kyle says, "thanks to martyrology, historians such as Edward Gibbon, artists such as J.L. Gérôme, novels and Hollywood epics such as *Quo Vadis*, the enduring image of Rome will forever be stained with the blood of the arena."<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of who examines the games or how they seek to explain or define them, it is unlikely that there will ever be a satisfying or comprehensive answer to the

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* 1905: 234 "It is difficult for us now to understand this lust of cruelty among a people otherwise highly civilised." Dill's remark, per Kyle, is representative of the perceived inconsistency between Rome's civilized nature and love of blood sport.

<sup>3</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* 1998: 7

<sup>4</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 1998: 3-5 "Sociologists Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning suggest that, to the degree that we moderns now feel reservations about such customs, we have been influenced by a 'civilizing process' whereby there has been a broad change in the manners and notions of decent behavior since the late Middle Ages. In recent centuries external factors, such as modern police and penitentiaries, and an internal factor, a conditioned psychology of abhorrence of excess violence, have contributed to a gradual shift in the parameters of embarrassment and shame, including reduced levels of interpersonal violence, increased sensitivity to pain, and an aversion to cruelty. Most moderns are conditioned to feel that the viewing of actual life-threatening violence in public should be distasteful and should be discouraged by the social order."

question of why the games existed and the full extent of their purpose.<sup>5</sup> This, however, is no reason to cease searching for new insight and new methods of investigation. One new approach can be found via the persistent characteristics of the games, which enable them to be categorized as ritual, i.e. as a repeated, theatrical and exaggerated social action.<sup>6</sup> When we classify them as a species of ritual, correspondences between the games and sacrificial practices become imminently visible due to the programmatic nature of both and by virtue of the violence that they share. As Burkert suggests, ritual is a behavioral pattern which has lost its original meaning over time, but which continues as a form of communication.<sup>7</sup> If the games are considered as ritual, and by extension a form of communication, they can then be looked at as a type of text or document, composed in a language all their own. This then opens the games to a whole new world of evaluation, namely to methods of interpretation more often applied to literature, than to social institutions.

Theories regarding allusion promise to be particularly fruitful in this instance due to the retrospective, repetitive elements of tradition. By applying the practices used to study allusion in literature, we can read the games as alluding to any number of other features of Roman life. The idea of intertextuality, in which one text refers to, directly

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<sup>5</sup> S. Brown, *Explaining the Arena: Did the Romans "Need" Gladiators?* 1995: 383 (comments) "A scholarly consensus as to 'the' explanation for the arena, especially across a wide geographical extent and a history of more than 700 years, is surely impossible."

<sup>6</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986:23 Burkert describes two functions of ritual behavior as repetition and theatrical exaggeration.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986: 23 Ritual is explained as a phenomena which can even be observed amongst animals and which has been described by biologists as, "a behavioral pattern which has lost its primary function—present in its unrutalized model—but which persists in a new function, that of communication. This pattern in turn provokes a corresponding behavioral response."

quotes, looks back at or emulates another text, can then be explored through comparisons to other rituals, customs and practices, as well as to literature itself. This approach could undoubtedly be employed in countless ways to countless subjects, but the current study will be limited to an investigation of parallels between the games and sacrificial practices, and between the games and representative literary examples from Homer and Livy.

The work of Homer will be employed in this study because of the ubiquity of his works in the Greco-Roman world and the cultural capital they possessed. It is especially convenient to explore comparisons with the funeral games for Patroklos in Book XXIII of the *Iliad* due to the similarity in context, i.e. that of a funeral, with the Roman games. This passage is particularly suitable because of the additional presence of sacrifice and athletic competition in the events of the ceremony. Additional comparisons to Roman literature are appropriate, so the work of Livy will also be utilized because of his frequent concentration on self-sacrificing, quintessentially Roman heroes who often participate in single combat. Livy's works are concerned with the creation and development of distinctly Roman practices and national identity, and he provides many illustrative examples of Roman *virtus*. Representative samples in the stories of both the elder and younger Titus Manlius Torquatus and that of Marcus Valerius Corvus will be explored in the course of this work.

It is clear that the games were far more than the entertainment of a morally bankrupt society, or a mere tool manipulated in the hands of a savvy few who wished to distract or intimidate an impressionable public; and there is a wealth of meaning still left to be unearthed and explored. The gladiator, too, as Barton argues, was more than just a

“twisted ‘athlete’ in a twisted ‘sport,’ the embodiment of Roman sadism, brutality and callousness.”<sup>8</sup> The violence and cruelty of both the games and gladiator personified key elements of Roman life, including religious practice and the display of masculine virtue so highly valued by Rome’s citizens. An integral part of daily life, like sacrifice, the games were characterized not only as obligation, but as an expression of commitment to the people of Rome. The gladiator, in his tortured position as both adored “rock star” and abhorred villain, participated in the games as an agent and representative of the Roman people. He absorbed the undesirable traits of the community and purged the community of them as he both fought and died valiantly. He performed in ways that evoked the most admirable qualities and memorable acts found in the literature, myths and legends that Romans used to define themselves. Ultimately, as the following chapters will argue via the study of allusion, the games and gladiator together embodied the very essence of Roman identity.

## **A Brief History of the Games**

### ***Early Origins***

Before embarking on an investigation of the games through the study of allusion, it seems expedient first to discuss the origins of the games and to briefly describe their history and changes which occurred over time.

Evidence for the earliest origins of gladiatorial combat is unreliable and has long been the subject of scholarly debate. General consensus favors the idea that they grew

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<sup>8</sup> Carlin A. Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans* 1993: 11

from Etruscan funerary practices and athletic events, but Campanian origins have also been proposed.<sup>9</sup> There is literary support for both the Etruscan and Campanian theories, but none of the sources relied upon in either case are more persuasive than the others. Likewise, the material evidence used to reinforce the two theories is by and large too ambiguous to be entirely convincing.

The case for the Campanian origins of gladiators is made via evidence such as that found in Book 9 of Livy's *History of Rome*. Here, Livy tells us that after a battle in 308 between the joint forces of Romans and Campanians against the Samnites, the victorious Romans dedicated captured arms of the defeated Samnites to the gods, while the Campanians, "out of pride and hatred of the Samnites armed gladiators, who were the entertainment at their banquets, in the ostentatious arms [of the defeated] and called them by the name of Samnites."<sup>10</sup> This passage, however, is hardly conclusive. We can glean

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<sup>9</sup> George Ville devotes the first chapter of his work *La gladiature en Occident des origines à la mort de Domitien* to the claim that gladiatorial combat was an early fourth century BCE Osco-Samnite custom that was adopted by Etruscans, who then passed on the practice to Romans in the late fourth and early third centuries. "Conclusions: au début du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle ou avant, la gladiature est inventée en Italie du Sud – création d'une population composite, osque, samnite, étrusque: on ne tentera pas de préciser davantage; à la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> ou au début du III<sup>e</sup> siècle, les *munera* sont adoptés en Étrurie; en 264 Rome voit son premier *munus* et les organisateurs adoptent peut-être une formule que les Étrusques avaient déjà naturalisée chez eux." (p. 8) Roland Augé also believes that the games came to Etruria from Campania (*Cruelty and Civilization* 1972: 21). Michael Grant, on the other hand, suggests that it was an Etruscan tradition that was picked up by the Campanians (*Gladiators* 1967: 10-12). Donald Kyle in *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* (pp. 253-256) favors Etruscan roots influenced by Greek forms of spectacle. However, in *Spectacles of Death* (pp. 43-45) he admits to our overall inability to trace the original location, context and transmission of the games with any certainty. In *Blood in the Arena* Alison Futrell provides a comprehensive account of both the literary and material evidence for both theories (pp. 9-19).

<sup>10</sup> Livy 9.40.17: *Campani ad superbiam et odio Samnitium gladiatores, quod spectaculum inter epulas erat, eo ornato armarunt Samnitiumque nomine compellarunt*. Silius Italicus addresses the same subject in 11.51 saying, "Moreover, it was once their custom to enliven banquets with slaughter and to mix dining with fearful spectacles of men fighting with swords; they often fell above the very cups [of the guests], and the tables were spattered with much blood (*quin etiam exhilarare uiris conuiuia caede mos olim et miscere epulis spectacula dira certantum ferro, saepe et super ipsa cadentum pocula, respersis non parco sanguine mensis*.) Strabo, too, mentions the same Campanian practice in his *Geography* (5.4.13). English translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

little from this beyond the fact that armed combat was used as entertainment at Campanian feasts by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This is certainly not compelling evidence that the Campanians invented the practice. It is also important to note that the sources who mention Campanian enjoyment of gladiatorial combat do so disparagingly. Their indulgence in this type of entertainment highlights the immoral ways of Campanians and foreshadows Capua's betrayal of Rome during the Hannibalic war. It seems unlikely that the Romans would adopt a practice with negative connotations, invented by people whom they grew to hate ardently—let alone adopt that practice as a means of paying tribute to their honored dead. Some other source for the games, one which perhaps both Romans and Campanians drew upon, would be more believable.

The literary evidence in support of Etruscan origins is also problematic. Nicolaus of Damascus says in his *Athletics* that the games were a practice the Romans were given by the Etruscans.<sup>11</sup> Tertullian admits to some uncertainty about the origins of gladiatorial combat, but based on the authority of his sources he attributes the origins to the Etruscans.<sup>12</sup> Isidorus of Seville offers further evidence of Etruscan origins based on the etymology of the word *lanista*, the technical term for the procurer and trainer of

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<sup>11</sup> Nicolaus of Damascus *Athletics* 4.153 “τὰς τῶν μονομάχων θέας οὐ μόνον ἐν πανηγύρεσι καὶ θεάτροις ἐποιοῦντο Ῥωμαῖοι, παρὰ Τυρρηνῶν παραλαβόντες τὸ ἔθος.”

<sup>12</sup> Tertullian *De Spectaculis* 5.1-4 “Concerning the origins [of the games], as they are remote and unknown amongst most of our people, they had to be investigated thoroughly from no other source than pagan literature. . . . Thus, in Etruria they introduced the spectacles along with others of their superstitious practices in the name of religion. Thence the Romans imported the performers and also the name. (*De originibus quidem ut secretioribus et ignotis penes plures nostrorum altius nec aliunde investigandum fuit quam de instrumentis ethncalium litterarum. . . igitur in Etruria inter ceteros ritus superstitionum suarum spectacula quoque religionis nomine instituunt. inde Romani arcessitos artifices mutantur, itemque enuntiationem.*)

gladiators.<sup>13</sup> This explanation, however, is somewhat weak. One might also point out that talent in the training and traffic in gladiators does not necessarily have any bearing on their origins. After all, by the Late Republic much of the trade in gladiators was focused in Campania.<sup>14</sup>

Material evidence for the origins of the games is also ambiguous. Etruscan tomb paintings like those in the Tomb of the Bigae are offered in support of Etruscan origins, but the figures represented are not directly engaged in combat and could just as easily be involved in Pyrrhic dance or some other similar exhibition.<sup>15</sup> In the Tomb of the Augurs at Tarquinia, the painting of a figure labeled “Phersu” is, some argue, evidence of an early form of wild animal combat similar to later *venationes*. The scene, which consists of Phersu holding the leash of a large dog or cat (deterioration of the painting makes it difficult to tell which) attacking a man armed with a club whose head is enveloped in a large sack or hood, has been interpreted in various ways. Futrell, for example, thinks this could be an early combination *venatio-mumus*, while Ville thinks it is some kind of foot race or track and field competition.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, the scene is quite vague and without the support of additional, explicit evidence, it is impossible to make any certain conclusions. Tomb paintings found in Paestum are similarly used to argue for Campanian origins,<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Isidorus of Seville, *Etymologiae* 10.159 “Lanista, ‘gladiator,’ that is, an executioner, so called from the Etruscan language, from ‘tear into pieces’ (laniare) with regard to bodies.” Barney, et al. translation. (*Lanista, gladiator, id est carnifex, Tusca lingua appellatus, a laniando scilicet corpora.*)

<sup>14</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 12

<sup>15</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 16-17

<sup>16</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 15-16

<sup>17</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 13

but the same doubts about the Etruscan paintings apply in this instance. In these paintings, armed men are engaged in some type of combat, but these could also just as easily be depictions of Pyrrhic exposition, narrative battle scenes or some other species of athletic competition. Moreover, the tombs at Paestum date to the latter half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, which coincides with the literary evidence. Even if the men represented are gladiators, the dating of the tombs once again only provides evidence that gladiatorial combat was *en vogue* in 4<sup>th</sup> century Campania, but it is not necessarily proof that Campanians invented it. In this light, the Etruscan evidence, which dates to the late 7<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> century, would then be the stronger—if one were able to confidently say that the figures depicted were, indeed, gladiators. As Kyle says, “the origin of gladiatorial combats is probably not a historical question answerable in terms of a single origin or location, a single original context, and a simple linear transmission. Combats, sacrifices and blood sports were simply too widespread in antiquity. . . whatever the origins or precursors beyond Rome, the best historical approach is to concentrate on the context of Rome’s adoption and development of the gladiatorial spectacle.”<sup>18</sup> In referring to the work of Wiedemann, he also points out that, “Rome’s motives for adoption may have differed from the original purpose of *munera* elsewhere.”<sup>19</sup>

Alison Futrell makes a great deal of sense when she points out that debate has assumed that the games were a foreign import. “In the tremendous variety of human endeavor, surely the idea of dueling as performance, whether for the living or the honored

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<sup>18</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 1998: 45

<sup>19</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 1998: 65



dead, is not such a bizarre concept. It may well be that the Roman version of gladiatorial combat was the systemization of a practice common to Italic peoples and not an import at all. This possibility must be considered, especially given the fairly tenuous arguments on both sides of the question of origins.”<sup>20</sup> Unless more conclusive evidence appears, the true origins of the games will remain unknown and unknowable, but an inability to pinpoint the exact origins of the games does not mean that useful information cannot be found in the available sources. Keith Hopkins prudently notes that, despite the fact that we lack conclusive evidence for the location of the origins, “repeated evidence confirms the close association of gladiatorial contests with funerals.”<sup>21</sup> In the end, although it is impossible to say where the games came from with any certainty, it is quite safe to say that they were chiefly connected to funerary ritual. In fact, there is no truly compelling reason why one need commit to one theory of origins over another. At the very least, we can agree that, as Tertullian tells us, once upon a time, “because it was believed that the souls of the departed are propitiated with human blood, [men of old] used to sacrifice captives or slaves of little value at funerals.”<sup>22</sup>

### ***Growth and Change During the Republican Period***

The canonical date for the introduction of the games in Rome is 264 BCE when Decimus Junius Brutus and his brother Marcus sponsored games in honor of their

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<sup>20</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 18

<sup>21</sup> Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* 1983: 4

<sup>22</sup> Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 12.1-4 *Nam olim, quoniam animas defunctorum humano sanguine propitiari creditum erat captivos vel mali status servos mercati in exequiis immolabant. . . Haec muneri origo.*

deceased father, Junius Brutus Pera.<sup>23</sup> There is some indication that games were held in the city prior to this time, but the dates and details of previous instances are undocumented.<sup>24</sup> It is safe to imagine that if games were held prior to these, they must have been very simple and small considering that only three pairs of gladiators fought on this occasion. Whether or not the games held in honor of Junius Brutus Pera were truly the first in Rome, it is significant that they are clearly stated as being part of funerary ritual. Obviously, gladiatorial combat had not and could not have been a part of every funeral, but another source, Servius, indicates that these particular games were considered obligatory.<sup>25</sup> This event was not simply in response to death, but in response to the death of an important man of particularly high status.

Following the games held for Junius Brutus Pera, similar events were sponsored in honor of other deceased men of high rank. The scale, popularity and frequency of *munera* all grew exponentially.<sup>26</sup> By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, it had become apparent that this method of paying tribute to the dead did not only reflected the prestige

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<sup>23</sup> Valerius Maximus 2.4.7 *nam gladiatorium munus primum Romae datum est in foro boario App. Claudio Q. Fulvio consulibus. dederunt Marcus et Decimus filii Bruti <Perae> funebri memoria patris cineres honorando.*

<sup>24</sup> A fragment thought to come from Suetonius' *De Regibus*, or possibly from one of his books on Roman games and spectacles, says that Tarquinius Priscus was the first to introduce the games to Rome. *Tarquinius Priscus prior Romanis duo paria gladiatorum editit quae comparavit per annos XXVI.* Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 233 However, not only is there no extant record of games between the reign of Tarquinius Priscus and the games in honor of Junius Brutus Pera, ancient sources explicitly name his games the first to be held in Rome.

<sup>25</sup> Servius, *Servii Grammatici in Vergilii Aeneidos* 3.67 *Apud veteres etiam homines interficiebantur, sed mortuo Iunio Bruto cum multae gentes ad eius funus captivos misissent, nepos illius eos qui missi erant inter se composuit, et sic pugnaverunt: et quod muneri missi erant, inde munus appellatum.*

<sup>26</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 24 "The *munera* continue to appear sporadically in the literary sources, revealing great advances in terms of scale and, presumably, elaborateness of production. From twenty-two pairs at the Aemelian games, to twenty-five pairs at the funeral of M. Valerius Laevinus in 200, to sixty pairs in 183 and seventy-four pairs in 174, the numbers involved increased consistently.

of the departed, but held great benefits for the living as a means of making a grand impression on a large number of citizens.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the games were increasingly exploited, particularly towards the end of the Republic, and *munera* were often postponed until they could be held at more politically advantageous times.<sup>28</sup> Progressively successful manipulation of the games inspired those who were politically ambitious to continue to court popularity amongst the masses by sponsoring games. However, as it was impossible for every aspiring demagogue to have a conveniently deceased relative of appropriate status, additional pretexts for games arose. Julius Caesar, most notably, bypassed the requirement of a dead male relation when he held games in honor of his daughter in 45 BCE, eight years after her death.<sup>29</sup> “In the first century BC, rival generals expanded and conflated existing spectacles and imported or invented variations to court popular support. . . . In theory or pretext *munera* under the Republic were always associated with death and funerary honors, but aspiring politicians clearly had to provide spectacles of death.”<sup>30</sup> The manipulation of *munera* was obviously becoming a problem,

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<sup>27</sup> For instance, in 122 BCE Gaius Gracchus caused a stir by tearing down seating reserved the nobles and then opening up the space to his constituency of plebs (Plutarch C. Gracch. 12.3-4). Upon the death of Sulla in 78 BCE, his supporters wielded significant political clout by means of the popular support (and fear) gained in part through the elaborate public funeral and games sponsored in his honor (Appian *Bellum Civile* 1.105-107)

<sup>28</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 30 “The *munera* had much to offer as an implement of public persuasion, and one could not count on a death occurring at the optimal moment. The temporal connection between the death of a noted individual and the production of *munera* was therefore stretched quite thin.” Caesar is the consummate example of this, having sponsored extravagant games in honor of his father’s death 20 years earlier (Dio Cassius 37.8).

<sup>29</sup> Suetonius *Divus Iulius* 26.2 “He announced games and a feast in memory of his daughter, which before him no one had done.” (*Munus populo epulumque pronuntiauit in filiae memoriam, quod ante eum nemo.*)

<sup>30</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 1998: 50

and laws were instituted in order to curb the use of the games for personal gain,<sup>31</sup> but crafty individuals like Julius Caesar found ways to circumvent regulations.

### *Imperial Manifestations*

As a result of their exploitation during the last few decades of the Republic, the face and function of *munera* had changed. By this time, there was little hope of maintaining or recovering their original purpose, at least, not in its entirety—if, indeed, any desire to preserve their original intent even existed. The Roman people had long since developed a taste for elaborate and violent spectacle and their political leaders had responded in kind.

In 44 BCE, just months before his death, the Senate honored Julius Caesar by means of a decree that all games in Rome and Italy would henceforth include one day dedicated to him.<sup>32</sup> At this time, the sponsorship of games was still a private matter and at the will of individuals, but with this action the Senate now become involved in the scheduling of events. In 42 BCE, gladiatorial combat was for the first time incorporated into *ludi* (not to be confused with *munera*),<sup>33</sup> religiously motivated state sponsored events held on a regular basis which often included chariot races, theatrical performances,

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<sup>31</sup> The *Lex Calpurnia de Ambitu* of 67 BCE, for example, imposes penalties on those convicted of using gladiatorial games as a means of electoral bribery (Cicero, *Pro Murena* 67). The *Lex Tullia de Ambitu* of 63 BCE forbids the exhibition of gladiators within a two years of running for office (Cicero, *In Vatinius* 15.37).

<sup>32</sup> Dio Cassius 44.6 The Senate bestowed upon Caesar “one special day of his own each time in connection with all gladiatorial combats both in Rome and the rest of Italy.” (Cary translation)

<sup>33</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 44 “In 42, gladiatorial combats joined the official roster of publicly sponsored games. At the celebration of the Cerialia, the aediles offered armed combats in place of the usual circus events.”

athletic competition, triumphal display, animal immolation or some combination of the above.<sup>34</sup> The organization of these *ludi* was the delegated responsibility of elected officials and they were yet another way that individuals gained and maintained status.<sup>35</sup> The addition of gladiatorial combat to the *ludi* widened access to the reputation-bolstering presentation of *munera*.

It was not long then, before *munera* and *ludi* became nearly synonymous. *Venationes*, or beast hunts, were rather naturally combined with gladiatorial combat since the exhibition and, more often than not, brutal destruction of animals for the purposes of entertainment or ritual was nothing new to Rome.<sup>36</sup> Just as the numbers and types of

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<sup>34</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 1998: 41-42 "Roman games (*ludi*) arose as celebrations of religious rites with sports or shows, acts of communal thanksgiving to the gods for military success or deliverance from crises. Inherently popular, they increased over time and became annual and state financed as supplements to traditional *feriae*. *Ludi* usually included *ludi circenses* or chariot races. . . and *ludi scaenici* or theatrical performances.

<sup>35</sup> The importance of this responsibility is illustrated in Cicero's *In Verrem* 2.5.36 "Now I have been elected aedile; I understand what I have accepted from the Roman people; I have been given the responsibility to present the most sacred games with the greatest care and reverence, those of Ceres, of Liber and Libera. I am to secure the good will of Flora for the Roman people by the celebration of games in her honor. I am to present the most ancient games, which were the first to be called "Roman," with the greatest dignity and solemnity in honor of Jove, Juno and Minerva. I have been made responsible for the protection of the sacred edifices and for the safety of the entire city." (*Nunc sum designatus aedilis; habeo rationem quid a populo Romano acceperim; mihi ludos sanctissimos maxima cum cura et caerimonia Cereri, Libero, Liberaeque faciundos, mihi Floram matrem populo plebique Romanae ludorum celebritate placandam, mihi ludos antiquissimos, qui primi Romani appellati sunt, cum dignitate maxima et religione Iovi, Iunoni, Minervaeque esse faciundos, mihi sacrarum aedium procurationem, mihi totam urbem tuendam esse commissam.*) About this passage, Futrell notes that, "Despite the serious tone of Cicero's declaration of duty, it is clear that the presentation of aedilician games became a real opportunity for an ambitious man relatively early in his career. A set of spectacular games would make a memorable impression on the people and establish the reputation of the aedile as a skilful administrator, a savvy and stylish auteur, and a generous benefactor, whose own resources would top off any gap in the funding supplied by the state. (*The Roman Games* 2006: 3)

<sup>36</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 1998: 42-43 "As well as having native hunting traditions, from early times Romans regularly killed animals in blood sacrifices, and the ritual process continued beyond the killing. . . in certain festivals, in addition to chariot races and theatrical performances, early Romans also hunted, baited or abused animals. In the *Ludi Cereales*, the games of the ancient fertility goddess Ceres, dating from before 202 BC, foxes with burning brands tied to their tails were let loose in the Circus Maximus. Pliny mentions an annual sacrifice of dogs who were crucified live and carried about in a

armed combatants had grown, greater numbers of more exotic animals were incorporated as a result of the rapid growth of the games as a whole and the increasing access to foreign species as Rome's frontiers expanded.<sup>37</sup>

The spectacle of violent execution of criminals and deserters had also been a long established both within Rome and abroad, sometimes with the use of animals, so the ultimate inclusion of capital punishment as a part of the games is unsurprising.<sup>38</sup> After all, gladiators were often recruited from the ranks of the damned. It was not too far of a stretch for the killing of the most pathetic or unforgivable of *noxii* to be included in the games.<sup>39</sup> Military triumphs, too, shared many of the elements present in the now extended games (exhibition of physical prowess, exotic and extravagant goods, public largesse, capital punishment) and so their association with gladiatorial combat was to be

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procession. In the Ludi Piscatorii fish from the Tiber were thrown live into a fire in the Forum. From 173 BC, the games of Flora. . . also included hunts of harmless small wild animals staged in the Circus. . . When *venationes* became an official part of state festivals in 169 BC, in addition to traditions of public sacrifice and rustic subsistence hunting, customs like the games of Ceres and Flora no doubt made Romans more receptive to the carnage of beast spectacles in the arena."

<sup>37</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 26 One of the theories "regarding the origins of the *venationes* sees it as an effect of the spread of Roman hegemony, suggesting that during the third century and after, success in battle against foreign foes opened up an area abundant in exotic animal resources, no exploitable by Romans. They displayed these new wonders in spectacles."

<sup>38</sup> From the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and following, Roman generals punished or killed deserters, runaway slaves or foreign enemies using animals. Paullus, for example, had deserters crushed by elephants in 167 BCE and in 146 BCE Scipio Aemilianus threw the same to wild beasts to entertain the Roman people (Valerius Maximus 2.7.13-14). Kyle tells us that, "For a host of crimes Rome punished criminals of low status with aggravated or ultimate punishments (*summa supplicia*), which included exposure to wild beasts, crucifixion, and burning alive. One could also be condemned to become a gladiator, or sent for life to the mines (*metallum*) or public works (*opus publicum*). From the time of Augustus on, various forms of executions were performed on an increasingly spectacular basis for the arena. . . Some of the punishments have precedents under the Republic, but under the Empire the torture and aggravated death of criminals became a standard part of *munera*."

<sup>39</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 1998: 91-92

expected.<sup>40</sup> The games eventually merged various types of spectacle into a grander and more complex whole. As Kyle tells us, “by the late first century BC, Rome had what might be called ‘conglomerate spectacles. . .’ [which] conflated pretexts (e.g. funerals, victory *ludi*, magisterial duty, electoral largesse, hunts, public banquets, patronage, punishment, vengeance) and were soon institutionalized by autocracy. From the circus to the theater, formerly separate elements continued in combination, with violence as the common mortar.”<sup>41</sup>

The “conglomeration” of games began with their incorporation into *ludi*, as mentioned above, and was further regularized and institutionalized during the reign of Augustus. He is credited with the tripartite schedule of morning *venationes*, midday executions (*meridiani*) and afternoon *munera*.<sup>42</sup> In 22 BCE he placed the organization of official imperial *munera* in the hands of the praetors, but strict limitations were also placed upon the number of days, money and combatants for each event.<sup>43</sup> *Munera* and *venationes*, hitherto presented on an irregular basis, were now part of the established

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<sup>40</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 1998: 42 “As well as the procession of the successful general (the *triumphator*) in the guise of Jupiter, triumphs included the ritual public murder of the captured enemy leader in the Forum, representing the vanquishing of the threat to Rome. As Rome’s frontiers expanded, displays of foreign beasts were added (to symbolize foreign enemies and lands), and later large numbers of displayed and killed directly at Rome. *Ludi Magni Votivi* originated as triumphal games vowed by generals to Jupiter before a campaign. . . Originally occasional, some votive *ludi* were institutionalized as regular annual games, such as the *Ludi Victoriae Suillae* from 82 and the *Ludi Caesaris* from 46 BC, and the days of *ludi* grew accordingly.”

<sup>41</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 1998: 51

<sup>42</sup> Katherine Coleman, *Martial: Liber Spectaculorum* 2006: 1xxiii

<sup>43</sup> Dio Cassius 54.2, 54.17, Katherine Coleman, *Martial: Liber Spectaculorum* 2006: 1xxiii. “Without banning privately sponsored gladiatorial games outright, he [Augustus] curbed the potential for senators to use this means to capture a popular following: senatorial permission was to be required for all such events; nobody was to hold more than two *per annum*; and the number of gladiators to be displayed was capped at 120.” There were, however, no limits on the resources which the emperor could devote to displays.

calendar. Official imperial schools for gladiators were later created and the state became intimately involved in the trade and regulation of gladiators.<sup>44</sup>

Changes introduced by Augustus led the games to be centrally organized, a development which made it easier to spread this “Romanizing” practice to outlying areas of the empire. Officials outside of Rome acted as the representatives of the emperor and the games were a means of asserting control and validating hierarchy.<sup>45</sup> The use of the games for the dissemination of political rhetoric still persisted, but it was now a form of communication restricted to an even smaller group of individuals than previously, and the messages conveyed were more single-minded than in the past. Communication, however, went two ways and the games were not only a forum for the emperor’s voice, but also for that of the people, who could occasionally express their dissatisfaction or approval.<sup>46</sup>

Variation and extravagance were now within the domain of the emperor’s munificence. Some rulers would take this license to excess, while others sought simplicity or even to put an end to the games. Either way, the games were set within the

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<sup>44</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* 2007: 312 “The privately owned gladiatorial schools of the Republic were banned from Rome as emperors, probably under Augustus and definitely by Domitian, set up four imperial gladiatorial schools (*Ludus Magnus, Dacius, Matutinus, Gallicus*), each with a small training arena and facilities for housing gladiators.”

<sup>45</sup> Alison Futrell, *The Roman Games* 2006: 29-30

<sup>46</sup> During the Republic, the games had been seen as a forum for popular opinion. Cicero says that there are three locations where the wishes of the people can be expressed and ascertained; the assembly, the *comitia*, and at the games. (*Pro Sestio* 106, “*Etenim tribus locis significari maxime de (re publica) populi Romani iudicium ac voluntas potest, contione, comitiis, ludorum gladiatorumque consessu.*”) During the imperial period, the games were often a means for the emperor to demonstrate his imperium, but the expression of public sentiment was not eradicated. As Futrell says, “Deprived of any voice in government during the Principate, the plebs exchanged their traditional forum for a form of expression in the amphitheater. They formed clagues to chant about whatever was on their minds. The issues could be relatively simple ones, characterized by the chant “*Jugula! Jugula!*” (accompanied by a graphic throat-slashing gesture), or touch on more standard political areas, such as demands for cheaper bread or changes in taxation.” (*Blood in the Arena* 1996: 45-45)



bounds of an established, predictable formula of events.<sup>47</sup> During the empire, the games had become a regular feature of Roman life, and one which persisted until its collapse and beyond.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* 2007: 312 “In the Early Empire different blood sports were regularized into a day-long format (*munera legitima*). Hunts in the morning were sometimes supplemented by executions by means of animals (*damnatio ad bestias*). Lunchtime shows, (*meridiani*) might include tame diversions (e.g., athletics, dances, and novelties) or staged executions. Gladiatorial combats followed in the afternoon. Dutiful emperors soon fully institutionalized these elaborate and costly entertainments, and the Roman people continued to expect and enjoy the spectacles provided for them.”

<sup>48</sup> Kyle, referring to the work of Wiedemann says that, “combats continued through the fourth century despite local or temporary bans. He [Wiedemann] concludes that the combats were not killed but rather died off gradually in the fifth century. . . . Gladiatorial games had been dependent on imperial (economic and legal) structures and munificence for centuries; with a few exceptions (e.g. the Northwest) they ended with the demise of emperorship in the West. While beast shows and executions continued on a reduced scale, gladiatorial combats, as the most expensive and infrequent spectacles, were vulnerable to the systems collapse of the western Empire. (*Spectacles of Death* 1998: 55) Although gladiatorial combat as it existed during the Republic and Empire came to an end, similar forms violent combat for entertainment (albeit less deadly) have persisted until the present.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GAMES AND SACRIFICIAL RITUAL

#### An Examination of Public Sacrifice

Just as it was practical to examine the origins and history of gladiatorial combat, so too discussing the basics of Roman sacrificial ritual will also help to facilitate clearer comparisons between the games and sacrifice and assist in furthering the idea of the games as a type of ritual.

Roman religious life was incredibly diverse and became increasingly so as the empire's borders grew and new forms of worship were introduced. As a result of this, the reduction of its history and variety into a simple overview is impossible. Even focusing on a single, central facet, such as sacrifice, is problematic. Sacrifice was ubiquitous not only in Roman life, but in antiquity at large, and was subject to a great deal of variation. The act of sacrifice fulfilled a range of functions. It could be petitionary, expiatory, or votive.<sup>49</sup> It could be a public event held in front of a temple and performed by a religious

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<sup>49</sup> John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion* 2003: 96-97 "Sacrifice was central to all major ritual celebrations. . . it took many forms and was, furthermore, combined with a wide variety of intentions and contexts. Traditional Roman sacrifice did not commemorate any particular event. . . it did not symbolise total abandonment to the deity or aspire to incorporate the god. Sacrifice was a banquet which offered men the possibility of meeting their divine partners, of defining their respective qualities and status, and of dealing together with business that needed to be done. For example, human beings could make the most of this meeting to make their excuses for any deliberate or unavoidable infringement of the deity's property or dignity (with an expiatory sacrifice), to present a request or to convey thanks (through supplications or prayers for mercy), or to conclude contracts (with vows)."

official, or a private ceremony performed in the home by the head of the family.<sup>50</sup> Offerings could fall into two categories depending on the type of sacrifice being conducted: blood and bloodless. Blood sacrifice consisted predominantly of the slaughter of pigs, sheep, goats and cattle, although other animals such as dogs, horses and cockerels could be used depending on the ceremony.<sup>51</sup> Bloodless offerings could include objects such as garlands of flowers, offerings of grain, sacrificial cakes, honey, milk, salt wine, fruit, incense or perfume.<sup>52</sup> For the purposes of this work, the focus will be on public sacrifices held in honor of the state cult because a great number of people participated in, and benefited from, these rituals.

In his *Roman Antiquities*, Dionysius of Halicarnassus provided the description of a sacrifice that is particularly relevant both because it was a public, state sponsored sacrifice and because it was a part of the *ludi magni*, which did not include gladiatorial combat, but were a somewhat similar combination of spectacle and religious practice.<sup>53</sup> Dionysius' description is also convenient because it is an exemplary model of the six part "ideal" form of Roman public sacrifice as identified by Beard, North and Price:

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<sup>50</sup> John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion* 2003: 79-80

<sup>51</sup> Human sacrifice in Rome was not unheard of, but was very rare and in response to the absolute worst of catastrophes, such as the defeat at Cannae (Livy 22.57). These sacrifices, however, did not parallel with typical ritual sacrifice and was typically the more "passive" killing of either a Vestal or foreign couple by burying them alive. See Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 1998: 36-38

<sup>52</sup> Valerie Warrior, *Roman Religion* 2002: 40

<sup>53</sup> *Ludi Magni* or *Ludi Romani* were votive games held in honor of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. Chariot races were the highlight of these games, but they also featured foot races, boxing and wrestling matches. Dionysius of Halicarnassus suggests these events are further evidence of the Greek origins of Rome's founders, since Greeks engaged in all of these contests, as evidenced by Homer's description of the funeral games for Patroklos. (Dionysius of Halicarnassus 7.73)

(a) the procession (*pompa*) of victims to the altar; (b) the prayer of the main officiant at the sacrifice, and the offering of wine, incense, etc. as a 'libation' at the altar; (c) the pouring of wine and meal (*mola salsa*) over the animal's head by the main sacrificant; (d) the killing of the animal by slaves; (e) the examination of the entrails for omens; (f) the burning of parts of the animal on the altar, followed normally (except in some cases where the whole animal was burnt) by a banquet taken by the participants from the rest of the meat.<sup>54</sup>

Dionysius begins with an extensive account of the *pompa* with which the ceremony commenced. Young men on the verge of manhood, either on foot or on horseback depending on the status of their fathers, were at the head of the procession "in order that strangers might see the number and beauty of Rome's youth."<sup>55</sup> Charioteers and contestants in the athletic competitions followed behind the young men. Three bands of armed Pyrrhic dancers organized according to age came next, accompanied by flute and lyre players. After these, yet another band of dancers followed dancing in a bawdy style known as *sicinnis*, impersonating satyrs and mocking the dancers who had come before them. Yet more lyre and flute players followed them and after then came people carrying censers with incense and various sacred vessels. Lastly, the images or statues of the gods were brought forth on the backs of participants. This procession began on the Capitoline, continued through the Forum and ended at the Circus Maximus, where the consuls and priests then sacrificed oxen.<sup>56</sup>

The subsequent sacrifice described by Dionysius is so similar to the established Greek ritual that he is convinced that the founders of Rome were Greeks from different

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<sup>54</sup> Mary Beard, et al. *Religions of Rome* 1998: 148

<sup>55</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ρωμαϊκή Αρχαιολογία* 7.72.1

<sup>56</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Ρωμαϊκή Αρχαιολογία* 7.72.1-14

places who had assembled in Italy.<sup>57</sup> The consuls and priests followed the expected pattern:

After washing their hands they purified the victims with clear water and sprinkled corn on their heads, after which they prayed and then gave orders to their assistants to sacrifice them. Some of these assistants, while the victim was still standing, struck it on the temple with a club, and others received it upon the sacrificial knives as it fell. After this they flayed it and cut it up, taking off a piece from each of the inwards and also from every limb as a first-offering, which they sprinkled with grits of spelt and carried in baskets to the officiating priests. These placed them on the altars, and making a fire under them, poured wine over them while they were burning. It is easy to see from Homer's poems that every one of these ceremonies was performed according to the customs established by the Greeks with reference to sacrifices.<sup>58</sup>

In his work *Homo Necans*, Walter Burkert presents an extensive reconstruction of ordinary Greek sacrifice which is also worth examining given Dionysius' assertion of the uncanny resemblance between Greek and Roman ritual. Prior to the description of the *pompa*, Burkert provides a description of pre-ceremony preparations, which included bathing, dressing in clean clothes, putting on ornaments and wreaths and often abstaining from sexual activity. Sacrificial victims were likewise "dressed-up," with garlands, gilding on their horns and woolen fillets. Once the *pompa* began, both the participants and their offerings "departed from the everyday world, moving to a single rhythm and singing."<sup>59</sup> The procession carried participants from the secular world to a sacred place, where an altar and fire awaited them. Virgins led the charge, carrying baskets or other vessels containing the sacrificial implements and a censer was used to "impregnate the

<sup>57</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Ρωμαϊκή Αρχαιολογία* 7.72.18

<sup>58</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Ρωμαϊκή Αρχαιολογία* 7.72.15-16 Loeb translation

<sup>59</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986: 3

atmosphere with the scent of the extraordinary.” There was musical accompaniment, usually the flute.<sup>60</sup> Here, the Roman scheme differs because of their use of male youths rather than virgins as the leaders of the procession. This could, perhaps, be symbolic of the Roman partiality for masculine strength and vigor. It is also notable that the Pyrrhic dancers are not a feature of Burkert’s reconstruction of Greek ritual (or, at least, he does not explicitly mention them). However, if this was an unexpected variation, it clearly was not one which troubled Dionysius, since he identifies both the Pyrrhic and *sicinnis* dancing as distinctly Greek.<sup>61</sup>

Upon reaching the designated sacred area, participants marked off a circle by carrying the sacrificial implements around the assembly, once again separating the sacred realm from the secular.<sup>62</sup> A description of this act is missing from Dionysius’ account, but it is possible that this was simply an understood part of the *pompa* and something he did not deem worthy of mentioning. Dionysius is generally quite meticulous in his descriptions, but earlier in the passage he does refrain from going into further detail for fear of tiring his readers with information that is commonly known.<sup>63</sup>

The victim’s willing participation was an important element of the process and a sign that a higher will was commanding compliance. The sprinkling of the victim’s head with water (or *mola salsa*) caused the animal to nod or bow its head, which was

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<sup>60</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986: 4

<sup>61</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Ρωμαϊκή Αρχαιολογία* 7.72.7-10 The Pyrrhic dancing has strong claims to Greek antiquity, as Dionysius compares it to Homer’s description of a procession in the peaceful city depicted on the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*, book XVIII

<sup>62</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986: 4

<sup>63</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Ρωμαϊκή Αρχαιολογία* 7.72.12

perceived as a gesture of acceptance.<sup>64</sup> Naturally, animals were not always fully cooperative, and Scheid tells us that, “in principle, the victim had to indicate its consent, particularly by lowering its head. For this reason, it would generally be tied by a harness fastened to a ring at the foot of the altar so that, with a little help from the sacrificer, it would make the gesture of acquiescence.”<sup>65</sup> Once the victim showed its submission, the knife was finally uncovered, a few hairs from the animal’s head were shorn off with it and thrown into the fire. Attendants then struck the death blow and blood was finally spilled.<sup>66</sup> At this point, Burkert says, the women in the crowd ululated, and “whether in fear or triumph or both at once, the ‘Greek custom of the sacrificial scream’ mark[ed] the emotional climax of the event, drowning out the death-rattle.”<sup>67</sup> Once the act of violence had been completed, there was an examination of the entrails by a seer and the meat was then carved and distributed to the participants--with the exception of the portions of meat consecrated to the god. “Thus the inner circle of active participants [were] brought together in a communal meal, transforming horror into pleasure.”<sup>68</sup>

Participation in sacrifice created, strengthened and maintained social bonds. Whether it was through one’s place in the order of the procession or through the carrying of implements or the actual physical violence of the ritual, every member of society had a place and a purpose. Burkert tells us that,

<sup>64</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986: 4

<sup>65</sup> John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion* 2003: 83

<sup>66</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986: 5

<sup>67</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986: 5

<sup>68</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986: 6

Complicated social structures find expression in the diverse roles the participants assume in the course of the ritual, from the various “beginnings,” through prayer, slaughter, skinning, and cutting up, to roasting and, above all, distributing the meat. . . Each participant has a set function and acts according to a precisely fixed order. The sacrificial community is thus a model of society as a whole, divided according to occupation and rank.<sup>69</sup>

Sacrifice was a means by which an individual, “proclaim[ed] his membership and place in a community”<sup>70</sup> and whereby social hierarchies were upheld.<sup>71</sup> Gladiatorial games, too, fulfilled similar functions in Roman life. The games cannot only be classified as ritual simply because of their recursive quality, but because they contained many elements analogous to those just examined.

### Correspondences Between the Games and Sacrifice

As discussed in the first chapter, the Roman games varied widely in scope and schema over the centuries. Although they were often subject to the creative impulses and extravagance of *editores* and *imperatores*, basic elements were nevertheless adopted and consistently repeated.<sup>72</sup> A certain degree of *variatio* or innovation was surely a necessary facet of the games in their role as spectacle and entertainment, but their repetitive features

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<sup>69</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986: 37

<sup>70</sup> Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986: 24

<sup>71</sup> Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986: 23

<sup>72</sup> Alison Futrell describes the general program of events in great detail in Chapter 3 of *The Roman Games: A Sourcebook*: 84-119. As mentioned in the previous chapter, by the time of the late Republic, the games followed a general pattern of a procession followed by beast hunts, the execution of criminals at midday and then, finally, armed combat between gladiators. The *munus legitimum* was standardized by Augustus and the format was more or less maintained until the fall of the empire. A more extensive discussion of these elements aspects will appear in the following pages.



contributed to the establishment of a formulaic pattern which, on some level at least, still maintained the essence of the original religious and ritualistic nature of *munera*.

The night before the games, a public banquet was held for gladiators and other performers. We have evidence for these banquets from mosaics such as that from El Djem and from sources such as Plutarch.<sup>73</sup> This banquet was not merely akin to a condemned prisoner's "last meal," but was also ritualistic, like the pre-pompa preparations described by Burkert. Brettler and Poliakoff, quoting the comparative ethnographic work of Karl Meuli, suggest that, "the vile blood of the prisoner or slave was ritually unsuited for the funeral offerings and. . . that the *cena libera* functioned as a ritual for turning an undesirable man into a free and noble victim."<sup>74</sup> This meal, especially in light of the abstentious behavior of some gladiators, was similar both to the special preparations of participants in a sacrifice and to the preparation of a victim.<sup>75</sup> This meal had a cleansing aspect, giving the gladiator a physical purity and perfection comparable to that demanded of animals in regular blood sacrifices.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Alison Futrell, *The Roman Games: A Sourcebook* 2006: 86-87. This banquet, which may have been open for public observation, resembled symposia. It was just as often somber as it was raucous. Plutarch approves of the gladiator's use of this time as some of them, "when about to enter the arena, though many costly viands are set before them, find greater pleasure at that moment in recommending their women to the care of their friends and in setting free their slaves, than in gratifying their belly." (*Moralia* 1099B, Loeb translation)

<sup>74</sup> Marc Zvi Brettler and Michael Poliakoff, *Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish at the Gladiator's Banquet: Rabbinic Observations on the Roman Arena* 1990: 94

<sup>75</sup> John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*: 71-72. Depending on the event, celebrants would sometimes hold banquets and even spend the night in temples prior to performing a ritual.

<sup>76</sup> Georges Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion* 1970: 554

The games, like sacrifice, also began with a *pompa*. Tertullian notably marks the religious aspect of this procession with the disgust one might expect from a Christian author criticizing demonic idolatry and pagan practices.<sup>77</sup> A more objective source, a grave relief of *munera* from Pompeii, helps to further illuminate the procession. Lictors lead the *pompa*, dressed in togas, bearing the fasces. They are followed by *tubicines*, or trumpeters, who are in turn followed by men with a platform on their shoulders carrying the images of gods and deified emperors. Behind these are figures carrying writing tablets and palm branches, presumably to record victories and reward victors. The *editor* followed the “score-keepers,” surrounded by gladiatorial armature. Still more musicians follow the *editor*, and then horses. Although the relief does not show them, Futrell suggests that in an actual procession the horses would have most likely been followed by the human and animal performers.<sup>78</sup> This *pompa* is similar to that of a regular sacrifice as already discussed, but it seems to be a more masculine adaptation, with the theme of political and military prowess highlighted.

The procession, rather than ending at a temple or other sacred precinct, led to the amphitheater, yet another area defined by a circular boundary, separating the ordinary from the extraordinary. There, the crowd took their places according to their status and

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<sup>77</sup> Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 7.2-3 “The procession comes first, showing in itself who it belongs to from its string of idols, the column of images, the chariots, the wagons and carriages, the thrones, the garlands and tokens. Moreover, how many rites, how many sacrifices precede, interrupt and follow [the event], how many guilds, how many priesthoods, how many offices are astir, with the result that all in that city know where the gathering of demons is lodged.” (*Pompa praecedens, quorum sit in semetipsa probans de simulacrorum serie, de imaginum agmine, de curribus, de tensis, de armamaxis, de sedibus, de coronis, de exuviis. Quanta praeterea sacra, quanta sacrificia praecedant, intercedant, succedant, quot collegia, quot sacerdotia, quot officia moveantur, sciunt homines illius urbis, in qua daemoniorum conventus consedit.*)

<sup>78</sup> Alison Futrell, *The Roman Games: A Sourcebook*: 86-88

rank in the Roman social hierarchy, just as the participants in the aforementioned sacrifice.<sup>79</sup> Emperors, Vestal Virgins, augurs, pontiffs and senators occupied the lowest seats, next to the arena. Behind them, equestrians, soldiers, civilians, foreigners, women and even slaves all had separate, designated seating areas.<sup>80</sup> The arena was an ideal, more orderly, spatially arranged microcosm of Roman society.

After the *pompa*, a day at the games began with *venationes*, or animal shows. During the Republic, animals were often put on display as war trophies and not necessarily hunted or made to fight.<sup>81</sup> Exotic animals were sometimes trained to perform spectacular tricks and were quite valuable, so it is unlikely that they would have been slaughtered indiscriminately. Countless others however, both domestic and foreign, were

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<sup>79</sup> Burkert's statement that "The sacrificial community is thus a model of society as a whole, divided according to occupation and rank" (*Homo Necans* 1986: 37) is reflected in a remark of Fronto's, who says in his *Principia Historiae* 17 that successful government relies no less on the games than it does on serious matters and that the entire populace is brought together by spectacles (*Imperium non minus ludieris quam seriis probari. . . spectaculis universum populum conciliari*).

<sup>80</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 164 "Augustus enacted legislation to extend the social distinctions enforced previously at the theater to cover the audience at the *munera* as well. He then further elaborated on these regulations, specifying who, exactly, could sit where and with whom." Suetonius describes these changes in detail in chapter 44 of his *Life of Augustus*. As we learn from Martial (Epigrams 5.14, for example), spectators did not always respect the rules of stratified seating.

<sup>81</sup> Exotic animals, particularly elephants, were often taught elaborate tricks and were often used simply for exhibition. After his success in Sicily in 252 BCE, L. Metellus reportedly brought 140 elephants to Rome, which were made to fight in the circus and were later killed with javelins, but this seems to have been because no one knew what else to do with them (Pliny 8.6.16-17). Elephants later drew Pompey's chariot in his African triumph and for games given by Germanicus they were taught to imitate the battles of gladiators, engage in Pyrrhic dances and even to walk a tight-rope (Pliny 8.2.2). Kyle tells us that, "From the first exhibition of elephants in 275 to the first 'hunt' (*venatio*) in 186 BC to the great triumphal shows of Pompey and Caesar, the beast spectacles became more and more popular. During the second half of the first century BC exotic animals (e.g. giraffes, crocodiles) were apparently merely displayed as curiosities and not killed, but probably before and certainly later the beasts that appeared in *venationes* were routinely killed. These 'hunts' spread from state festivals to funeral games and shows (*munera*), they expanded in size with imperial excesses from Augustus to Commodus and beyond, and they outlived the decline and fall of gladiators and of Rome itself." (*Spectacles of Death* 1998: 42)

killed in the arena, particularly in the imperial period. Futrell suggests that, “after the initial excitement generated simply by their appearances wore off, the Romans sought novel sensations by making the animals fight.”<sup>82</sup> It is also possible that exposure to sport hunting in the Near East contributed to the increase in hunting spectacles. Whatever the inspiration, prior to the *venationes* of the arena, “both Greece and Rome had traditions of hunting, fighting, baiting, or abusing animals as displays of masculinity and status, as rituals and as a recreation.”<sup>83</sup>

Over time, *venationes* became increasingly bloody and lethal, but they were not carnage simply for the love of carnage.<sup>84</sup> The death of animals in the *venationes* was not only similar to the slaughter of animals in other religious rituals, it was also an expression of courage, physical strength, and Rome’s mastery of both nature and the world of men.

As Donald Kyle says,

These hunts represented imperial power, suppression of threats, provision of security, and protection from uncivilized chaos and social disorder. The collection of the animals was a form of circumambulation ritual—a “beating the bounds” to lay claim to hunting territory, and the exotic animals were paraded like alien prisoners of war.<sup>85</sup>

The killing of domestic animals in the arena, such as bulls and pigs, was a novel variation of commonplace sacrificial offering, while the incorporation of foreign animals into the same events symbolically assimilated the farthest reaches of the empire into a practice that, although shaped by outside influences, had grown into something distinctly Roman.

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<sup>82</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 26

<sup>83</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* 2007: 266

<sup>84</sup> Augustus, for example, claims to have destroyed 3,500 animals in *venationes* in his *Res Gestae* (22).

<sup>85</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* 2007: 268

*Venationes* were at once the representation of devotion to the community inherent in sacrifice and a display of the successful application of that devotion abroad.

After the *venationes* came the *meridiani*, or midday executions. It was at this point that the greatest number of human deaths occurred. Gladiators, though often criminals or slaves, were of a different class than *noxii*, men and women doomed to even harsher punishments than gladiators.<sup>86</sup> As Kyle says,

In the early spectacles all the human victims came from the same class of social outsiders and convicts—uncontrollable slaves, captives, deserters, and heinous criminals—all threatening offenders and abominations to be disposed of quickly, publicly and brutally. *Damnati* included both gladiators and *noxii*, but there was a hierarchy of skill, virtue and hope. ‘Professional’ gladiators were agonistic: theirs was a life or death struggle, but for *noxii* there was ‘no contest,’ for they had not been selected for gladiatorial training (i.e. as *damnati ad ludum gladiatorium* or *venatorium*). As non-citizens beyond the rights and obligations of *mos* and *lex* (e.g. the right to exile, suicide, or normal execution by beheading (*ad gladium*)), *noxii* faced *summa supplicia*—the worst forms of aggravated capital punishment.<sup>87</sup>

*Noxii* had shown contempt for the law, the Roman people and their rulers. Their lives were therefore forfeit and an expendable commodity for public demonstrations of Roman, and particularly imperial, hegemony.<sup>88</sup> Seneca is commonly cited as being

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<sup>86</sup> Kyle, referring to the work of Edmondson, says that “even types of executions reflected a social hierarchy: decapitation by the sword was less demeaning than death by crucifixion or fire, which were less demeaning than being thrown to the beasts. As he says: ‘The normal result was death in all cases, but the niceties of social stratification had to be preserved even in death. Stratification provided structure even in the deracinated world, the demi-monde, of those who performed in the arena.’” (*Spectacles of Death* 1998: 117)

<sup>87</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 1998: 91

<sup>88</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 47 “The criminal had not only wronged his victim, he had attacked the people who abide by the law, society at large and the sovereign, who was the force of the law. Crime thus placed the ruler in contempt. Public execution restored the law through the destruction of the criminal, the threat to the system. It reestablished the sovereign, who made a display of his strength by his contempt for the life of the criminal. More than that, public execution was an exercise in terror. By making a spectacle out of the suffering and death of the individual, the ruler emphasized his own power and his

critical of *meridiani* in his *Epistulae Morales*, however it is the behavior of the crowds that he finds objectionable, not the executions, which he refers to as “most just” in his *De Ira*.<sup>89</sup>

In the imperial period, executions were increasingly staged as reenactments of famous battles or reenacted scenes from mythology, which Coleman refers to as “fatal charades.”<sup>90</sup> Because *noxii* were generally frightened, untrained amateurs, these performances did not always remain faithful to the stories on which they were based. However, as Coleman says, “in a society where mythology was the cultural currency, the ritual events of ordinary life might naturally be set in a mythological context; to put it more broadly, Greco-Roman mythology provided an all-encompassing frame of reference

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own superiority. It was meant to be cruel and unusual. To maintain order, the emperor provided an object lesson for the Roman people, a warning about the fate of those who dared to offend the state.”

<sup>89</sup> Seneca describes the distasteful conduct of the crowd in *Epistulae Morales* (7.3-5) “In the morning they throw men to the lions and bears, at midday they are thrown to the spectators. . . They cry ‘Kill him! Beat him! Burn him! Why does he meet the sword so cowardly? Why does he fight so timidly? Why is he so fearful in dying? Let him be driven with blows to meet his wounds! Let them receive blow after blow with bare, exposed chests!’ When there is a pause in the spectacle, they shout, ‘Let there be some throat-cutting, lest nothing happen in the meantime.’” (*Mane leonibus et ursis homines, meridie spectatoribus suis obiciuntur. . . ‘Occide, verbera, ure! Quare tam timide incurrit in ferrum? quare parum audacter occidit? quare parum libenter moritur? Plagis agatur in vulnera, mutuos ictus nudis et obviis pectoribus excipiant.’ Intermissum est spectaculum: ‘interim iugulentur homines, ne nihil agatur.’*) In his *De Ira* (2.2.4) he says that executions are *iustissimorum*, although they are sad to behold (*Mouet mentes et atrox pictura et iustissimorum suppliciorum tristis aspectus*).

<sup>90</sup> Martial, for example, tells of a reenactment of the liaison between Pasiphae and the bull in his *De Spectaculis* 6 (*Iunctam Pasiphaen Dictaeo credite tauro: vidimus.*) Tertulian also tells of the castration and burning of *noxii* in the guise of Attis and Hercules in his *Apologeticum* 15.4-5 (*Vidimus aliquando castratum Attin, illum deum ex Pessinunta, et qui vivus ardebat, Herculem induerat.*) Martial also provides an example of the reenactment of scenes from history in his Epigrams (1.21), when he describes the burning of the hand of Mucius Scaevola. Fitzgerald believes this is part of a cycle of epigrams on the spectacles and a “punitive charade in the arena.” (William Fitzgerald, *Martial: The World of the Epigram* 2007: 58)

for everyday Roman experience. A superficial appropriateness was quite adequate; points of detail did not have to correspond.”<sup>91</sup>

Coleman describes the various functions of these public executions as: retribution, humiliation, correction, prevention and deterrence.<sup>92</sup> On the issue of humiliation, which was central both in the staging of the execution and in the behavior of the spectators, Coleman says that,

The humiliation of the offender further validates the processes of the law by distancing the onlooker from the criminal and reducing the possibility of a sympathetic attitude towards him on the part of the spectators. . . The public nature of Roman execution shows that one purpose of humiliating the miscreant was to alienate him from his entire social context, so that the spectators, regardless of class, were united in a feeling of moral superiority as they ridiculed the miscreant.<sup>93</sup>

This may certainly be the case, but it seems reasonable to add to this (and the other functions) yet another objective to the *meridiani*, one of religious observance. This may not have been a conscious action on the part of the spectators, but awareness is not necessary for a correspondence with other rituals to exist. Within the jeers and irreverence of the audience are echoes of Greek religious practices, namely those of the Thesmophoria and Dionysia, rituals which prominently included ridicule and obscenity.<sup>94</sup> These rituals reestablished order by means of a temporary lack of composure and the disregard of codes of proper behavior, and which had connections to blood and death (in

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<sup>91</sup> K.M. Coleman, *Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments* 1990: 67

<sup>92</sup> K.M. Coleman, *Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments* 1990: 45-49

<sup>93</sup> K.M. Coleman, *Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments* 1990: 47

<sup>94</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* 1991: 163, 244. Many thanks to Larissa Carlson for pointing out this correlation.

the case of the Thesmophoria) and involved theatrical displays (in the case of the Dionysia).<sup>95</sup> Reenactments of episodes from myth and history brought tradition to life before the audience's eyes and must have been similar in many ways to a passion play or Nativity drama.

A day at the games culminated in the *munera* proper. As Potter describes:

Before the actual fighting began there was an official inspection of the weapons, a display of the instruments of encouragement mentioned in the gladiatorial oath, and a general showing off by the contestants. Then, at a signal from the *munerarius*, a trumpet sounded and the first pair of gladiators were matched against each other under the supervision of two referees. A variety of different encounters was then to be expected: between gladiators on foot, armed with different sorts of weapons; between mounted gladiators; and between gladiators driving chariots.<sup>96</sup>

Seneca's description of the gladiator's oath is particularly compelling because he conflates this oath not only with military service, but with the commitment one must make to virtue. "You have promised to be a good man," he says, "having enlisted under oath, which is the greatest chain binding you to good judgment. . . The words of this most honest compact are the same as those of the most base: 'to be burned, to be bound and to be killed by the sword,' from those who loan their strength to the arena."<sup>97</sup> Indeed,

<sup>95</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* 1991: 245-246

<sup>96</sup> David S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire*: 314

<sup>97</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae* 37.1-2 *Quod maximum vinculum est ad bonam mentem, promissisti virum bonum, sacramento rogatus es. . . Eadem honestissimi huius et illius turpissimi auctoramenti verba sunt: 'uri, vinciri ferroque necari'. Ab illis qui manus harenae locant.* The oath similarly appears in Petronius' *Satyricon* 117 "And thus, in order that the farce might continue amongst all, we swore to an oath decreed by Eumolpus: to be burned, to be bound, to be beaten, to die by the sword and to anything else Eumolpus might order. Just as proper gladiators, we most solemnly enslaved our bodies and souls to our master." (*Itaque ut duraret inter omnes tutum mendacium, in verba Eumolpi sacramentum iuravimus: uri, vinciri, verberari ferroque necari, et quicquid aliud Eumolpus iussisset. Tanquam legitimi gladiatores domino corpora animasque religiosissime addicimus.*) Barton tells us, "this conflation is characteristic throughout the period [i.e. that of Seneca]. . . So many Romans, especially in the upper classes, never experienced war



Seneca was not amiss in comparing the oath of the gladiator with that of the soldier, since the soldier swore to completely obey his officers, the law and the regulations of camp, and to not abandon the standards. He consecrated both himself to the gods in the event that he failed to uphold this oath, and also his possessions and family.<sup>98</sup> Virtue, for both the soldier and the gladiator, was complete, unquestioning devotion--a willingness to suffer any hardship and to sacrifice one's own life. As Barton says, "the gladiator, by his oath, transforms what had originally been an involuntary act to a voluntary one, and so, at the very moment that he becomes a slave condemned to death, he becomes a free agent and a man with honor to uphold."<sup>99</sup>

The gladiator's oath sheds light on the various dimensions of his status. As a criminal or slave sentenced to death, he was part of the class of loathed "infamous" figures, but through his oath he aligned himself with what was noble and virtuous. His struggles were not cowardly or base; he sought matches with equally skilled opponents.<sup>100</sup> He was simultaneously the lowest of the low and the embodiment of excellence.<sup>101</sup> His success in battle could be equated with the successes of Rome's

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firsthand during this period that their military language and their experience of the soldier is increasingly modeled on that of the gladiator." (*Sorrows of the Ancient Romans* 1993: 16)

<sup>98</sup> Carlin A. Barton, *Sorrows of the Ancient Romans* 1993: 15

<sup>99</sup> Carlin A. Barton, *Sorrows of the Ancient Romans* 1993: 15

<sup>100</sup> Seneca, *De Providentia* 3.4, "The gladiator thinks it a dishonor when he is matched with an inferior opponent, as he knows that there is no glory in conquering one who is conquered without danger." (*Ignominiam iudicat gladiator cum inferiore componi et scit eum sine gloria uinci qui sine periculo uincitur.*)

<sup>101</sup> In his *De Spectaculis*, Tertulian remarks on the contradictory fame and dishonor of the gladiator. "What perversity! They love those whom they punish, they degrade those whom they applaud, they praise the art and demean the artist. How reasonable is it that a man is vilified for the same actions through which he

valued soldiery, while his defeat was the fall of any enemy or some other undesirable. Moreover, because the oath was taken willingly and freely,<sup>102</sup> “the murder [was] changed to an act of mutual complicity , a conspiracy between victim and executioner, gladiator and spectator.”<sup>103</sup>

The contradictory nature of the gladiator’s reputation further illuminates his dual role in the “sacrifice” of the games. It is not a stretch to suggest that the death of the gladiator, originally a funerary offering for an individual, eventually became analogous to a typical public sacrificial offering for the benefit of the community. Just as the games changed over time from rare, private events into grand spectacles with much wider intentions and significance, particularly after being combined with *ludi*, the gladiator as an offering also increased in scope. More than just an instrument of mediation between men and gods, this victim absorbed and provided an outlet for, “all the internal tensions, feuds, and rivalries pent up within the community”<sup>104</sup> and possessed many of the qualities of Girard’s “scapegoat.” The gladiator, as either a criminal, foreign slave or other type of liminal being, was in opposition to or damaging to ordered society.<sup>105</sup> His death purged the community of a harmful element. At the same time, his association with meritorious qualities, which aligned him with figures of devotion and virtue, made him a valuable

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gains a reputation?” (22.3-4 *quanta perversitas! amant quos mutant, depretiant quos probant, artem magnificant, artificem notant. quale iudicium est, ut ob ea quis offuscetur, per quae promeretur?*)

<sup>102</sup> “*Volens*” and “*libens*,” according to Seneca 37.2.

<sup>103</sup> Carlin A. Barton, *Sorrows of the Ancient Romans* 1993: 17

<sup>104</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 1977: 7

<sup>105</sup> René Girard, *The Scapegoat* 1986: 12-23

offering. The willingness with which he made his oath and faced death further associated him with the willing animal victim who nodded his head in assent.

The victorious gladiator also fulfilled the role of Hyam Maccoby's "sacred executioner," which he describes as a figure who, in instances of human sacrifice, "slays another person, and as a result is treated as both sacred and accursed."<sup>106</sup> He further states that the sacred executioner was a, "figure of guilt who [was] banished from society, yet carrie[d] with him society's gratitude for taking upon himself the burden which would be too heavy for his fellows to bear."<sup>107</sup> Unlike Maccoby's description, the gladiator was not banished from society, but he was denied the full range of rights guaranteed to other Romans.<sup>108</sup> He was not considered a fully functional member of the community. He did, however, receive the gratitude of the community in their cheers as he performed as the community's vicarious agent in the execution of the most extraordinary and powerful of sacrifices. His separation from the community allowed them to enjoy all the benefits of his actions, without themselves partaking in or incurring the taint of crime. Gladiatorial combat, the third element in the tri-partite games, was akin to the third element of the tripartite lustral sacrifice of the *suovetaurilia*.<sup>109</sup> Both through his death and through the

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<sup>106</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *The Sacred Executioner* 1982: 7

<sup>107</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *The Sacred Executioner* 1982: 21

<sup>108</sup> Alison Futrell, *The Roman Games* 2006: 130-131

<sup>109</sup> The *venationes* and *meridiani* corresponding to the other victims. The *suovetaurilia*, the sacrifice of a boar, ram and bull dedicated to Mars (Woodard 103-104), was not only for the purification and consecration of private fields as described by Cato (*De Agricultura* 141), but was also used for the purification of the people (Varro, *De Re Rustica* 2.1.10 "When the Roman people are purified, a boar, a ram and a bull are driven around." *populus Romanus cum lustratur suovetaurilibus, circumaguntur verres aries taurus*) and of the army (Livy 1.44 "There the entire army was drawn together and he purified them with the sacrifice of a boar, ram and bull." *Ibi instructum exercitum omnem suovetaurilibus lustravit*).

action of killing, the gladiator protected and purified the people. Just as Romulus killed Remus, gladiator killed gladiator, and Rome was safer, stronger, and intact because of it.<sup>110</sup>

Lastly, there is a correspondence between the games and sacrifice in the fact that food was often distributed at games. The distribution of food was not simply an act of benefaction, a means of pacifying an idle plebian class with “bread and circuses”<sup>111</sup> and thereby gaining popular support.<sup>112</sup> This was a communal meal, just as that at the finale of the sacrifice as described by Burkert.<sup>113</sup> By means of this element, the entire community was unified in a banquet that was a symbolic, “acknowledgement of the necessity of death in the continuation of life.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> This, too, was a type of sacrifice.

<sup>111</sup> Juvenal, *Satura* X.

<sup>112</sup> That is to say, the provision of food was not just an instance of *euergetism* per Paul Veyne’s description (*Bread and Circuses* 1976: 10-11), but had a greater meaning. Katherine E. Welch notes that, “Free public banquets had regularly been given in conjunction with gladiatorial games since at least the second century BC. Livy tells us: “on the occasion of the funeral of Publius Licinius [in 183 BC], there was a public distribution of meats and one hundred and twenty gladiators fought, and funeral games were given for three days and after the games a public banquet. During this, when the banqueting tables had been arranged through the whole Forum, a storm coming up with great gusts of wind drove most people to set up tents in the Forum.”<sup>18</sup> The manner in which Livy describes the association of the banquet and the distribution of food with gladiatorial games suggests that it was not unusual. (The incident is only mentioned because of its anecdotal value.) Thus, imperial largesse is not on its own an adequate explanation for the importance of the arena to the ancient Romans.” (*The Roman Amphitheater* 2007: 5) The distribution of food had implications similar to those of the communal sacrificial meal.

<sup>113</sup> See note 68.

<sup>114</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1986: 22-23

### CHAPTER III

#### THE GAMES AND LITERATURE

Similarities and connections between the games and state sacrifice have been explored, but despite the resemblances one cannot say with conviction that the games were modeled exclusively on sacrifice or were intended to explicitly function as sacrifices. Rather than clearly and openly mimicking sacrifice, the games seem to *allude* to sacrifice, that is, to employ traditional topoi in new contexts and thereby establish a relationship between present experience and past tradition.<sup>115</sup> The *pompa*, the slaughter and feasting that brought together members from different strata of the community did not correspond exactly to sacrifice, but rather evoked commonplace practices that were familiar to all. Indeed, the entire atmosphere of the games was charged with an allusive quality, thanks to the *venationes*, which suggested successful foreign battles and encounters with the natural world; and the *meridiani*, which brought to life scenes from myth and history. The *munera*, too, called to mind important values and customs which will be further explored in this chapter.

The games in their entirety can be seen not only as an institution which alluded to other social customs and rituals, but also one which alluded to literature and to the native myths and legends which Romans used to define themselves. The games alluded to true-to-life, daily practices and experiences, but also to idealized, literary representations of

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<sup>115</sup> *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets* Tr. Charles Segal 1986: 10-11

those practices and experiences. The games were, as Clifford Geertz would say, a “piled-up structure of inference and implication,” an intertwined web of significance which we must pick our way through in order to find meaning.<sup>116</sup> Though they lack a one-to-one correspondence, the repetitive nature of the games allows them to be classified as a type of ritual and thus, they can further be classified as a form of communication.<sup>117</sup> From here, we can dare to go even one step farther: to think of this form of communication as a type of text or document and then attempt to analyze it as one.

### **Conte and a New Way of Interpreting the Games**

In his work *Memoria dei Poeti e Sistema Letterario*, Gian Biagio Conte offers an interpretation of literary allusion that provides a useful apparatus for looking at the games as a type of allusive text. Conte divides the concept of allusion into two elements. The first element is the traditional idea of the “Exemplary Model,” a specific word or text which is precisely imitated. The second, alternative model is that of “Model as Code,” or “a system of conscious, deliberate rules that the author identifies as indicators of ways in

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<sup>116</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* 1973: 7

<sup>117</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1983: 23 Ritual is “a behavioral pattern which has lost its primary function—present in its unritualized model—but which persists in a new function, that of communication. This pattern in turn provokes a corresponding behavioral response.” This exists even amongst animals, as he shows through the example of the triumph ceremony of greylag geese. The “victor” is not prompted by a real enemy and the threatening behavior against a nonexistent opponent is meant to draw attention to the solidarity between mates. This behavior is confirmed by corresponding behavior of the female. One might say that in a similar way, although the games were initially a means of venerating the respected dead, over time they came to have a much broader significance and purpose, to the point of overshadowing their original intentions.

which the text must be interpreted.”<sup>118</sup> The concept of the distinction between Exemplary Model and Model as Code, although abstract, becomes clear when applied to the example of Virgil’s imitation of Homer. Homer is,

nearly always Virgil’s ‘exemplary model’ (together with Apollonius of Rhodes, Naevius, Ennius, the Greek and Roman tragedians, and several other authors), but he is also constantly the ‘code model.’ That is, he is present as the model divided into a series of individual sedimented units, but he is also the representative of the epic institution that guarantees the ideological and literary functions of poetry itself.<sup>119</sup>

In more simple terms, there is a separation between Homer’s works as a text from which Virgil directly draws words and images and Homer’s works as part of a canon of texts, which together contribute to a larger, shared concept of what the epic genre is, and which functions similarly to a Platonic form. Individual works of literature within a genre are then variations or permutations which may allude either to a specific text or texts, to “Exemplary Models,” or to a “Code Model” or “form,” such as Epic. These two models can, in some instances, be one and the same (i.e. Homer is both the Exemplary Model and Code Model for Virgil), but the separation is one of great significance.

The separation of Exemplary Model and Model as Code creates a system in which “one text may resemble another not because it derives directly from it nor because the poet deliberately seeks to emulate but because both poets have recourse to a common literary codification.”<sup>120</sup> In this way, allusion can thus be either a direct, conscious

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<sup>118</sup> Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation* 1986: 31

<sup>119</sup> Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation* 1986: 31

<sup>120</sup> Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation* 1986: 28

rhetorical trope or something more indirect and in some cases possibly even unintentional. A literary work is ultimately the blending of new meaning, motives and creative energy with tradition, either explicitly or implicitly. As Conte says, “the process of literary composition is, to some degree, a process of assimilation in which a text centralizes different languages and accepts responsibility for a new sense of the whole.” Allusion is “a cog in the general mechanism of textual composition. . . part of the rhetoric that systematically constitutes literary discourse.”<sup>121</sup> A text (or in our case, the games) can allude to another text, or even to a genre as a whole, without direct or clear “quotations” simply by utilizing words, symbols, images, or actions which are associated with that text or genre.

Also significant in Conte’s work is the idea of allusion as a rhetorical tool which appropriates a measure of the prestige of previous works and authors and also allows a new work to be situated in a tradition, to become a member of a pair, “old” and “new.” Here, allusion creates a relationship of competition, in which the new work attempts to establish itself as an improvement over the original.<sup>122</sup> Allusion, as a means of positioning a text as both part of, and in opposition to, tradition<sup>123</sup> is also important in this study’s adaptation of Conte’s ideas and its application of his models to the Roman games. Each presentation of the games is open to variety, change and innovation, but is

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<sup>121</sup> Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation* 1986: 28

<sup>122</sup> Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation* 1986: 26

<sup>123</sup> Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation* 1986: 27 “Tradition can be defined simply as poetic “langue,” the simultaneous projection of literary models and codifications, a single organic body of once individual but now institutionalized choices, a system of rules and prescriptions.”



still ultimately recognizable as part of a tradition and draws on the memory of former productions in order for the “improvements” to be recognizable.

Just as a work of literature is interwoven with allusions to Exemplary Models, Code Models, or both,<sup>124</sup> so too the Roman games are interwoven with allusions to a wide and varied set of models. The games draw on a great number of idealized Code Models: battle scenes from epic/literature/history, sacrifice and funerary ritual, combat and warfare, the socio-political hierarchy, entertainment and the legal/penal code, to name a few. Exemplary Models, both specific and general, can also be found for each Code Model. Homer, once again, is the Exemplary Model of literature. State sacrifice is the model for the trope of sacrifice (human sacrifice can also be considered the model offering in funerary ritual). Single combat is the model of combat and warfare. Aristocratic, administrative and/or imperial power structures are the models of the socio-political hierarchy. Spectacle is the model of entertainment and capital punishment the model of the enforcement of the penal code.

The ways in which each of the Code Models and their corresponding Exemplary Models are present in the Roman games deserves further exploration and could likely fill many volumes. However, for the purposes of the present discussion, one particular example serves to merge several models, to bring together literature and ritual, and act as a representative application of Conte’s ideas: the funeral games of Patroklos in Homer’s *Iliad*.

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<sup>124</sup> Literature can additionally allude to models (both Exemplary and Code) outside of the intended genre to form a sort of pastiche of, for example, epic, tragedy and lyric. Allusion need not be a “linear” progression within a closed system or a process without recourse to unrelated or unexpected models.

## Homer and the Funeral Games of Patroklos

The funeral games for Patroklos in book 23 of *The Iliad* are significant in a discussion of the Roman games not merely as an instance of literary allusion, but also as allusion to an ancient context (ancient both to us and to the Romans) in which models of mourning, sacrifice, feasting, competition, single combat, entertainment, social order and retribution were all combined.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, given that the Roman games were originally held under the auspices of funerary rites, the comparison is even more appropriate and one can find striking resemblances and many direct correspondences between the two.<sup>126</sup> In fact, this passage is both an Exemplary Model and Code Model for the games.

Book 23 begins with Achilleus assembling the Myrmidons, who then drive their chariots together around the body of Patroklos three times, crying in grief and swearing vengeance. This action can be seen as an overdramatic manifestation of the common preliminary element of sacrifice: the *pompa*, or procession, in which participants moved from the world of the secular to a sacred space—a space generally demarcated by a circle.<sup>127</sup> In this instance, the action of riding around the body can be seen as one which

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<sup>125</sup> The description of the funeral games is even more allusive in the fact that it is an amalgamation of type scenes, which Edwards describes as, “a recurrent block of narrative with an identifiable structure, such as a sacrifice, the reception of a guest, the launching and beaching of a ship, the donning of armor.” (*Homer and Oral Tradition: The Type-Scene* 1992: 285) When a type-scene is repeated, it is not necessarily composed using the exact same words as previous occurrences. In this way, type-scenes are also allusive, rather than purely imitative.

<sup>126</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 18-19

<sup>127</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1983: 3-4

creates the necessary sacred space for the subsequent funerary practice. Additionally, when Patroklos' funeral pyre is finally extinguished, the site is marked with a ring of stones, further confirming and establishing it as sacred place. As was described earlier, the Roman games began in a comparable fashion, with a procession of political and religious figures and elements, as well as performers, who made their way to a distinct and circular space: the arena.<sup>128</sup>

Following the "*pompa*" of Achilles and the Myrmidons in book 23, Agamemnon and the rest of the Achaians are summoned and an abundant funeral feast is provided. Private mourning then becomes public celebration. "Many shining oxen [are] slaughtered with the stroke of the iron, and many sheep and bleating goats and numerous swine with shining teeth and the fat abundant upon them [are] singed and stretched out across the flame of Hephaistos." The men "put aside their desire for eating and drinking."<sup>129</sup> As we saw before, food was likewise a part of the Roman games. "Redistribution of wealth through public banquets was a regular feature of public religion as well as private events, such as funerals, and those that straddled the dividing line between public and private, including triumphs and *munera*."<sup>130</sup>

After the feasting (and a night on the beach filled with unpleasant dreams) Achilles finally orders that a pyre be built. A continuation of the previous *pompa* occurs

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<sup>128</sup> Alison Futrell, *The Roman Games* 2006: 85-88. See the previous chapter for further description of the *pompa* of both sacrificial rites and the games.

<sup>129</sup> Homer, *The Iliad* Tr. Lattimore 1951: 451

<sup>130</sup> Alison Futrell, *The Roman Games* 2006: 111

when Patroklos' body is carried to and placed upon the pyre, along with jars of honey, oil and the slaughtered bodies of four stallions, two dogs and twelve Trojan captives. The additional valuable and perishable items poured upon the pyre mirror the irreplaceable nature of the deceased. Unlike the previous animal sacrifice, nothing is left for the living to eat or enjoy. That which is poured out is, like Patroklos, irretrievably lost. This element of the funeral games is perhaps the most dramatic and emotional of all. The items added to the pyre are a material symbol of Achilles' loss and an offering to Patroklos himself. As Alison Futrell suggests,

Blood sacrifices at funerals can be understood as grossly analogous to regularized animal sacrifice, in its provision of some sort of nutrition to the wispy surviving spirit of the dead, blood being in some sense the distillation of the life force. Human blood, being the most vivid reminder of his former existence, would surely be the most effective nutrient [for the deceased]. The sacrifice of a captive had further significance, in that the *anima* of the deceased could thus have its ethical or emotional needs met as well. The death of a prisoner would be morally satisfying to the dead man, as a sort of vengeance exacted upon those responsible for his death.<sup>131</sup>

The Trojan captives sacrificed by Achilles offer gory “nutrition” for the dead and stand in as representatives for the “criminals” responsible for his death. The death of these captives parallels the *meridiani* which, because they so often featured captives of foreign wars, perhaps fulfilled a similar desire for vengeance on behalf of the state and its members.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 183

<sup>132</sup> Both criminal executions and gladiatorial combat were also staged as reenactments of historical battles, in which case the “enemy of the state” is all the more visible and more likely to inspire and sate the thirst for blood.

Gladiatorial combat was, if the ancient sources are to be believed, the spilling of blood for the sake and satisfaction of the dead. As noted in the first chapter, Tertullian describes the games as the “amelioration of [an] earlier and more outright employment of blood offerings.”<sup>133</sup> Tertullian explains that at one time it was believed that the spirits of the dead were propitiated by human blood. Captives or slaves of bad quality were sacrificed at funerals who were later replaced with trained combatants in fights before the tombs of the dead. The skill of their performance, and the enjoyment of that skill, was meant to “cover up the impiety with pleasure.”<sup>134</sup> Servius also claims that gladiatorial combat replaced a former custom of killing captives at the tombs of great men because it, “after a time, seemed cruel.”<sup>135</sup> Whether or not the innovation was truly more pious and less cruel, the fact remains that even in the past, the games were seen as alluding to earlier Italic practices. The connections to the action that takes place at Patroklos’ funeral games also become more clear in this light, particularly in combination with the events which follow the additional sacrifices made at his pyre.

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<sup>133</sup> Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* 1997: 205 This is Futrell’s description of Tertullian’s passage on the origins of gladiatorial combat in his *De Spectaculis* 12.2-3 (*nam olim, quoniam animas defunctorum humano sanguine propitiari creditum erat, captivos vel mali status servos mercati in exequiis immolabant. postea placuit impietatem voluptate adumbrare.*)

<sup>134</sup> Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 12.3 “*postea placuit impietatem voluptate adumbrare.*”

<sup>135</sup> Servius *Ad. Aen.* 10.519 “The custom used to be to kill captives at the tombs of great men; however, since this seemed cruel after a time, it was decided that gladiators should fight before the tombs.” (*mos erat in sepulchris virorum fortium captivos necari: quod postquam crudele visum est, placuit gladiatores ante sepulchra dimicare.*)

When the previously mentioned blood sacrifices for the benefit of Patroklos are complete and his pyre is finally extinguished, Achilles retrieves from his ships a series of valuable items which he lays out as prizes for athletic competitions. The best of the Achaians then proceed to vie against one another in chariot races, boxing and wrestling matches, a foot race, personal armed combat, and throwing and archery competitions. Although only a small number of men are directly involved in these competitions, the rest of the army gather around as enthusiastic spectators. Bets are made, cheers go up, verbal barbs are exchanged by the onlookers—the audience is entertained. Meanwhile, the men involved in the various competitions pour all their strength and energy into their individual events, practically to a point of desperation. They strive and strain, they risk serious injury and put themselves in harm's way. Each *agon* becomes an opportunity to channel the destructive rage present in funerary custom. The participants endure at one another's hands the scratching, beating, tearing of hair and clothes, and smearing with dirt, ashes and blood which are typically self-imposed in mourning.<sup>136</sup> In the case of the funeral games, the self-destructive tendencies of mourning rituals, the reflexive, inward turning of the unfulfilled desire to protect a community member, obtain a sense of satisfaction and release in the substitution of a comrade for the true, unassailable entity responsible for the initial loss.<sup>137</sup> The *agon* provides a way for aggression to be turned outward once

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<sup>136</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1983: 52

<sup>137</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1983: 53 "It is an inevitable group reflex to offer to protect an endangered member against a hostile force by means of aggressive threats. When faced with death, this reflex aggression strikes out into a vacuum and hence returns upon itself. With no enemy near, the hand raised to strike comes down upon one's own head." Rene Girard would take this idea a step further and suggest that

again by paradoxically focusing it inward—into the arena, in the case of the Roman games. Stability is regained through “confronting death, in defying it through a display of readiness to die and in the ecstasy of survival.”<sup>138</sup> Sorrow and rage are “vented in a life-affirming form, through fighting, through an *agon*. . . . [and] death is mastered when the mourner becomes the killer,”<sup>139</sup> through the appropriation of the power over life and death. By means of the competitions at Patroklos’ funeral, the individual participants (and the spectators vicariously through them) mourn death, reaffirm life and strengthen the bonds between themselves. In the process, “a sense of community arises from collective aggression.”<sup>140</sup>

The Roman games likewise brought together great masses, who behaved much as did the spectators of Patroklos’ funeral games. Like the spectators at Patroklos’ funeral games, they too witnessed dramatic and theatrical competitions of martial strength, which were also, early on, in honor of the memory of an important and valued community member. Like the Achaian competitors, Roman gladiators bore the physical signs of loss in the blood and sweat that they shed on the sand of the arena. In the *Iliad*, death, mourning and sport are separate, but in the Roman games they are combined. In both the games and Homer’s text, there is a combination of

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violent tendencies are constantly present in society, not only in the context of the frustrated rage of mourning. He suggests that sacrifice in general serves to “polarize the community’s aggressive impulses and redirect[s] them toward victims that may be actual or figurative, animate or inanimate, but that are always incapable of propagating further vengeance.” (*Violence and the Sacred* 1972: 18)

<sup>138</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1983: 47

<sup>139</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* 1983: 53

<sup>140</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Tr. Carol Cosman 2001: 287

sacrifice, competition and observation, all in reaction to death and in commemoration of the deceased. Additionally, competitors in the *agon* and gladiators can be seen as standing in as representative mourners on behalf of the entire community. They endure the brunt of the suffering in order to facilitate the healing of others.

The relationship between active participants in the *agon* and spectators calls for further examination. The act of watching allows the spectator to feel involved in the *agon*, to believe he has a stake in the events taking place, yet remain at a safe distance. This distance furthermore reaffirms the distance and distinction between the active rulers and the passive ruled. Once again, Burkert's description of the atmosphere of sacrifice is particularly useful in understanding this relationship:

In a sacrifice the circle of participants is segregated from the outside world. Complicated social structures find expression in the diverse roles the participants assume in the course of the ritual, from the various beginnings, through prayer, slaughter, skinning, and cutting up, to roasting and, above all, distributing the meat. There is a 'lord of the sacrifice' who demonstrates his *vitae necisque potestas*. And as for the rest, each participant has a set function and acts according to a precisely fixed order. The sacrificial community is thus a model of society as a whole, divided according to occupation and rank. Hence, the hierarchies manifested in the ceremony are given great social importance and are taken very seriously.<sup>141</sup>

Just as the various roles in sacrificial ritual separate and organize participants, so too the separation between participants and spectators of a Homeric *agon* reaffirms the aristocratic hierarchy of the Homeric world by means of both inclusion and exclusion. The different types of competition and the different prizes awarded to the competitors at

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<sup>141</sup> Burkert 1983: 37



Patroklos' funeral games make further distinctions amongst the men who participate. This division can also be seen both in the differences between participants in the *venationes*, *meridiani* and *munera*, as well as in the stratified and segregated audience of the Roman games.

The gladiator, the active participant, was certainly not competing to establish his own rank in the hierarchy of the ruling class; however, his struggle was part of an ostensibly obligatory event, first as a duty to the dead, and later as part of the duties of men in particular stages of the *cursus honorum*<sup>142</sup>--men who were vying for a share of administrative power. In a sense, to partake in the role of *editor* was to take part in a process of initiation which stood to establish a man as part of the ruling class. Although the *editor* was not actively competing in the Homeric sense, sponsorship of the Roman games was nevertheless a symbol of one's particular place in the hierarchy of political power. Just as the gladiator was a stand-in mourner, he was also a stand-in competitor. This sense of competition may furthermore be at least partially responsible for the growth and expansion of the games over time. They not only provided an *editor* an opportunity to gain public support, but they also worked as a rhetorical tool that allowed the *editor* to appropriate a measure of the prestige of previous games and *editores*. Like the allusive author and work described by Conte, sponsorship of games allowed *editores* to be situated in tradition, to pair "old" against "new," to compete against former *editores* and

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<sup>142</sup> Futrell. *The Roman Games* 2006: 10 At different times, sponsorship of various *munera* was the duty of aediles, praetors and quaestors, but later they only did so under the auspices of the emperor.

their current rivals by staging games that were an improvement over others which had been sponsored in the past.<sup>143</sup>

This growing sense of competition and the idea of the gladiator as a stand-in competitor can be seen in changes over time in the gladiator himself. As we learned from Tertullian and Servius, participants in *munera* were originally “low quality” slaves<sup>144</sup> and criminals who were later replaced by trained professionals—increasingly qualified and capable men, who perhaps reflected traits that the *editor* wished to convey. Later still, we hear of aristocrats who gave up their status in order to participate in the arena.<sup>145</sup> With the advent of imperial restrictions on the sponsorship of games, fewer Roman elites had access to this form of competition by proxy. It is possible that some of these nobles were left feeling that pursuing glory in the arena firsthand was all that was left to them. Furthermore, as Barton notes, “so many Romans, especially in the upper classes, never experienced war firsthand during this period that their military language and their experience of the soldier [was] increasingly modeled on that of the gladiator.”<sup>146</sup> Denied

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<sup>143</sup> Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation* 1986: 26

<sup>144</sup> Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 12.1-4 “*captivos vel mali status servos mercati in exequiis immolabant.*” Tertullian does not elaborate on which qualities, exactly, cause a slave to be considered less valuable.

<sup>145</sup> Alison Futrell, *The Roman Games* 2006: 156-157 By the late Republic it appears that enough Roman elites were appearing as performers in spectacles that laws prohibiting their participation were first instituted in 46 BCE. Augustus and Tiberius were also known for the creation of laws restricting the circumstances under which elites could appear in the arena. Futrell suggests that the shock expressed in references to elites in the arena (i.e. in Juvenal 11.3-20) indicates that their presence there was not typical. However, copious legislation would not have been necessary if this was such a rare phenomenon and I suspect that this was much more common than Futrell proposes.

<sup>146</sup> Carlin A. Barton, *Sorrows of the Ancient Romans* 1993: 16

both sponsorship and military honors, it is possible that personal participation was a sort of last-ditch, desperate grasp at glory.<sup>147</sup>

Finally, the importance of the *agon* as an instance of single combat must not be overlooked. Single combat is not only the mode of competition at Patroklos' funeral games,<sup>148</sup> but it is a central, important convention of the Homeric world. Time and again, in type-scene after type-scene, aristocratic heroes seek *kleos* by singling out a worthy opponent for a duel on the battlefield. This heroic model was likewise an essential part of the Roman ethos and a common part of the stories they told about themselves.

### **Livy and Tales of Single Combat**

Patroklos' funeral is particularly compelling as both an Exemplary Model and Code Model for the games thanks to its primacy, ubiquity and the high regard in which it was held in the ancient world. However, seemingly endless other models exist and it is appropriate to examine a few of those which are Roman in origin. The stories of the elder and younger Titus Manlius Torquatus and that of Marcus Valerius Corvus from Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, are Exemplary Models of single combat which also include the elements of spectacle and spectatorship.

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<sup>147</sup> Emperors such as Nero and Commodus, too, sometimes took a turn at performing in the arena (or forcing others to do so). This, however, was seen as a moral failure on their part. It was never acceptable for elites to engage in activities in the arena, but when emperors, who were already the sole recipients of the prestige gained through sponsorship, engaged in this activity it was even more disgraceful. See Futrell, *The Roman Games* 2006: 158-159 for more.

<sup>148</sup> The personal, armed combat of the funeral games is not the only instance of single combat. Other competitions, such as the boxing and wrestling matches are competitions between two men. The remaining competitions also focus on the struggle between two men.

In Book 7, Livy tells the story of a young Roman noble from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE named Titus Manlius and the episode through which he earns the cognomen of “Torquatus.” When the Roman army comes face to face with an encampment of Gauls on the Via Salaria, a series of skirmishes ensues, but neither side is able to gain the advantage. During the standstill, a Gaul of enormous size steps forth from the crowd and challenges “whomever the Romans deem the bravest amongst them” to engage in single combat in order to determine which side is superior in war.<sup>149</sup> There is a great deal of hesitation on the Roman side, but Titus Manlius finally steps forward to accept the challenge—after obtaining the dictator’s permission to do so. The battle which ensues between Manlius and the Gaul is so much like a spectacle that Livy even tells us so. After arming him and escorting him to the spot where the battle is to take place, Manlius’ companions return to their places to observe, “with the two men positioned as if staging a spectacle, rather than abiding by the rules of war.”<sup>150</sup>

By volunteering to engage in this battle, Manlius became a surrogate for the Roman people as a whole. His victory, as Feldherr says, “not only brings [him] individual glory, but predict[s], or indeed determine[s], the outcome of the conflict between Gauls and Romans.” It, “acts to validate Rome’s intrinsic might and renders the Romans who witness it fiercer and more active; the defeat of the Gaul has an equivalently demoralizing

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<sup>149</sup> Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 7.9 “*quem nunc*’ inquit ‘*Roma uirum fortissimum habet, procedat aedum ad pugnam, ut noster duorum euentus ostendat utra gens bello sit melior.*”

<sup>150</sup> Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 7.10 “*Recipiunt inde se ad stationem; et duo in medio armati spectaculi magis more quam lege belli destituuntur.*”

effect on his fellows.”<sup>151</sup> However, in the act of volunteering, Manlius also ran the risk of failure and death. As a surrogate champion, his success stood to buoy his fellows, but in the event of his failure, although demoralized, they would be safe. His victory would be shared by all, whereas his death would be his alone.

Manlius’ duel was not simply a means of responding to a foreign threat. Participation in single combat was also an activity associated with the competition within the Roman aristocracy.<sup>152</sup> Due to his brave actions, Manlius is later elected consul. This promotion is a direct result of his involvement in a single combat. In this case, spectacle is clearly tied to an increase in popular support and is responsible for political advancement. It is the cheering audience that gives Manlius the *cognomen* of “Torquatus,” which becomes an honored title for him and his descendants.<sup>153</sup> Manlius’ identity is henceforth defined by this episode and he is an *exemplum* of Roman military, and therefore masculine, virtue.

This *exemplum* is not lost on Rome’s youth and Manlius’ one-on-one battle with a Gaul is soon mimicked by Marcus Valerius, who thinks himself no less worthy of the

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<sup>151</sup> Andrew Feldherr, *Spectacle and Society in Livy’s History* 1998: 93

<sup>152</sup> Andrew Feldherr, *Spectacle and Society in Livy’s History* 1998: 95 “Stephen Oakley has demonstrated the frequency and importance of single combat in Roman military practice and made clear that such duels cannot be regarded simply as a response to foreign challenges. Oakley collects over thirty examples of single combats and suggests that during the peak period of the Middle Republic, such combats could have happened as frequently as once a year. . . One of the tendencies that emerges from Oakley’s analysis is the link between participation in single combat and the competition for power and prestige within the Roman aristocracy.”

<sup>153</sup> Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 7.10 “*Inter carminum prope in modum incondita quaedam militariter ioculantes Torquati cognomen auditum; celebratum deinde posteris etiam familiae honori fuit.*”

same honors.<sup>154</sup> In a true instance of one-upmanship, Valerius does not battle a Gaul with just the approval of his commanding officer, but with the additional aid and endorsement of the gods, who send him assistance in the form of a raven. Valerius' *exemplum* competes with and magnifies that of Manlius. He inspires not just one youth, but entire legions, who not only watch, but are spurred on to victory over the Gauls when they are called upon to imitate him.<sup>155</sup> Ultimately, because of his victory in single combat, Valerius is also rewarded with political success and an honorific *cognomen* that persists for generations. His identity is inextricably linked with the *virtus* he exhibited as a competitor in single combat.

Wherever Livy offers good *exempla* to be emulated, he also offers those which are bad and which ought not be imitated. In Book 8 of *Ab Urbe Condita*, the son of Titus Manlius Torquatus provides Livy's readers an example of single combat gone wrong. This time, the Romans are engaged in hostilities with the Latins. In an attempt to restore military discipline to its former glory, the elder Manlius, now consul, demanded that no soldier leave his position to fight the enemy.<sup>156</sup> When goaded, however, the younger Manlius rushes into a brawl with one of the Latins, out of "anger or out of shame at the

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<sup>154</sup> Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 7.26 "M. erat Valerius tribunus militum adulescens, qui haud indigniorem eo decore se quam T. Manlium ratus."

<sup>155</sup> Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 7.26 "Camillus laetum militem uictoria tribuni, laetum tam praesentibus ac secundis dis ire in proelium iubet; ostentansque insignem spoliis tribunum, "hunc imitare, miles" aiebat, "et circa iacentem ducem sterne Gallorum cateruas."

<sup>156</sup> Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 8.6 "agitatum etiam in consilio est ut, si quando unquam seuero ullum imperio bellum administratum esset, tunc uti disciplina militaris ad priscos redigeretur mores. . . per haec ne quo errore milites caperentur, edicunt consules ne quis extra ordinem in hostem pugnaret."

thought of refusing a challenge.”<sup>157</sup> The younger Manlius acts without the approval of consuls or gods (i.e. *editores*). He does not fight within a designated area or within the ritualized regulations of single combat. He is forgetful (*oblitus*) of his father’s power and the orders of the consul. He throws himself headlong into a battle in which it matters little whether he is victorious or not. There is, once again, a spectacle, but it is one which is unauthorized, chaotic and in direct opposition to military *disciplina*.<sup>158</sup> Although he is victorious, Manlius’ actions do not earn glory. His disregard for law and order lead to yet another spectacle, a public execution. Here we see the other, *tristior* side of single combat. Here, just as in the games, the community is purged of a lawbreaker who, although undesirable because of his offense, nevertheless faces death valiantly and is admired for meeting his death honorably and fearlessly. As tragic as his execution is, the outcome is still positive because it strengthens military discipline, reestablishes order and ultimately leads the Romans to victory.<sup>159</sup>

As Lendon says, “when Romans imagined the fighting of their distant ancestors, they imagined it had allowed for and demanded formal combats that arose from challenges. Later Romans, in short, imagined a heroic culture not too far distant from the

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<sup>157</sup> Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 8.7 “*mouet ferocem animum iuuenis seu ira seu detractandi certaminis pudor.*”

<sup>158</sup> Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 8.7 “*oblitus itaque imperii patrii consulumque edicti, praeceptis ad id certamen agitur, quo uinceret an uinceretur haud multum interesset. equitibus ceteris uelut ad spectaculum submotis, spatio, quod uacui interiacebat campi, aduersos concitant equos.*”

<sup>159</sup> Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 8.8 “*fecit tamen atrocitas poenae oboedientiores duci militem; et praeterquam quod custodiae uigiliae et ordo stationum intentioris ubique curae erant, in ultimo etiam certamine, cum descensum in aciem est, ea seueritas profuit.*”

military culture depicted in the *Iliad*, but even more ceremonious and ritualized.”<sup>160</sup> In the absence of an *Iliad* or *Odyssey* of their own, or “a set of ancient stories from which they [could derive] ethics and ways of doing things, the Roman past was a set of admired ethics around which they later wove illustrative stories, and a set of ways of doing things to which they were strongly attached.”<sup>161</sup> Although evidence is lacking for the explicit imitation of the Torquatii and Corvus in the arena, the shared aspects of single combat and spectatorship are enough to situate the *munera* and these *exempla* within a common tradition, to draw them together into the complex whole of *Romanitas*. *Munera* did not need to employ direct “quotes” in order to evoke (i.e. allude to) well-known, time-honored tales of single combat. *Munera* and *exempla* are both cogs in the mechanism of “textual composition,” or in this case, the creation of national identity.<sup>162</sup>

Between the “borrowed” Greek texts and their own manufactured history, single combat emerged as a crucial and distinct element of Roman military and masculine virtue. This virtue found its regular expression and was prominently on display in the Roman games. The gladiator, although an outsider of one type or another,<sup>163</sup> was nevertheless an emblem of Roman identity. He was a surrogate competitor, a conduit for

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<sup>160</sup> J.E. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity* 2005: 175

<sup>161</sup> J.E. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity* 2005: 191

<sup>162</sup> Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation* 1986: 28 Allusion is “a cog in the general mechanism of textual composition. . . part of the rhetoric that systematically constitutes literary discourse.” As stated earlier, a text (or in our case, the games) can allude to another text, or even to a genre as a whole, without direct or clear “quotations” simply by utilizing words, symbols, images, or actions which are associated with that text or genre.

<sup>163</sup> Alison Futrell, *The Roman Games* 2006: 120-134 i.e. Prisoners of war, condemned criminals, slaves and free individuals who freely chose a life of “infamy.”



power and prestige and, in victory, a representation of masculine and military strength. In defeat and death, he provided lessons on good and bad behavior. Despite his questionable status, the gladiator gained glory through single combat,<sup>164</sup> through his participation in an *agon*—just like a Homeric hero, or a good Roman, like the elder Titus Manlius Torquatus or Marcus Valerius Corvus. Gladiatorial combat drew from Exemplary Models of literature and in the process, the gladiator himself became an Exemplary Model.

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<sup>164</sup> Alison Futrell, *The Roman Games* 2006: 135-138 “Some gladiators were real celebrities. immortalized in inscriptions, art, and in song.”

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

The search for examples of allusion within the Roman games is ultimately one which is overwhelmingly fruitful, both in terms of allusion to literature and in terms of allusion to other customs and actions. The present discussion has only scratched the surface and promises to become infinitely richer with extended exploration. However, even in the most simple terms, the comparison between the funeral games for Patroklos and the Roman games, as well as comparisons to native literature, begins to show the *munera* as a ritual which alluded to other practices and conventions and which can be understood as corresponding to Conte's ideas of Code Models and Exemplary Models. The ways in which these models and the games intertwine to create new or expanded meaning have only begun to become apparent. With further study, the games could be shown to allude to a wide variety of practices and values, as well as to countless other literary passages. Just as a text may employ allusion to previous works or to conventions of a genre to gain legitimacy and find a competitive place within a textual tradition, ritual action can similarly allude to behavioral precedents and establish a relationship of emulation, opposition and improvement over the original—a very Roman concept, indeed.

What becomes most clear in any sustained examination of the Roman games is that they were an incredibly complex, complicated development of and amalgamation of various practices and purposes over an extended period of time. Due to their endless intricacies, it seems unlikely that a fully comprehensive account of the games will ever be composed, but it is clear, however, that the games are intimately linked to both funerary and sacrificial rituals. To think of the games as simply a perverse form of entertainment or as a means of pacifying and manipulating a fickle crowd for political gains does not do justice to the full extent of their history and functions. Given their similarities to public sacrifice and to the beneficial, unifying qualities of such a practice, our concept of the games must be expanded and recognize that they included many elements which alluded to the daily, fundamental customs of Roman life.

Likewise, the gladiator was a multifaceted figure who performed a variety of roles and who cannot be defined simply as an entertainer of low or undesirable status. When victorious, he was a sacrificial officiant by proxy, a surrogate military and political competitor and a stand-in mourner. In defeat, he purged the community of undesirable qualities, but also provided an example of the sort of fearlessness and selflessness that a Roman soldier was expected to exhibit. He was, in many ways, a didactic character who presented both good and bad *exempla* and taught Romans how to be Roman.

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